

2021 ANNUAL REPORT



enabling people with disabilities



Our MISSION

We empower people with disabilities to live self-directed lives in an equal and inclusive society. Each person is supported and valued within an environment which promotes their overall autonomy, health and wellbeing, and enables them to reach their potential.

Our CORE VALUES

- Independence
- Partnership
- Openness
- Integrity
- Accountability and Transparency
- Participation in Community Life
- Person Centredness
- Rights Based Approach

Our VISION

Ability West is dedicated to enabling people we support to realise their goals and ambitions.

We will deliver on this vision by:

- Placing the fundamental rights of the people we support at the centre of our activities and promoting those rights
- Empowering each person we support to live self-directed lives and to play a meaningful role in all aspects of community life
- Listening and then developing a variety of options that can be used flexibly to meet their identified needs
- Developing the skills and dedication of our staff in a supportive and motivating environment
- Working in active partnership with the people we support, families, staff, our voluntary supporters and the broader community
- Campaigning at local, regional and national level to resource and realise our vision to achieve these aims.

Front Cover: Centre l-r: Eanna Conneely and Joe O'Brien, Cois na Coille – pictured with their beautiful wall art made from recycled materials.

Bottom Right: Owen O'Malley, Sandyvale Residential Service – fulfilling one of his PCP goals of getting a tattoo.

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CHAIRPERSON'S REVIEW



Kevin Newell, Chairperson

2021 was a busy and challenging year for Ability West in the midst of the various waves of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the organisation was deemed 'an essential service' by Government in 2020, we continued to provide services to the children and adults we support, albeit at reduced levels in some cases, although we were very pleased to return to almost full capacity in the latter months of 2021. Many service users and staff availed of the national vaccination programme and this had a positive impact on the delivery of services and allayed a lot of anxiety for everyone.

Our frontline staff and back office teams continued to work incredibly hard for the second year of the pandemic, often under significant pressures at peak periods of the virus. I would like to thank all our teams for their dedication and

commitment to the people we support. I would also like to acknowledge the support we received from the Health Service Executive, Health Protection and Surveillance Centre, and the Department of Health during 2021.

Ability West has prepared its financial statements in accordance with generally accepted accounting practice and the Companies Act 2014. The full audited accounts for 2021 are available on our website: www.abilitywest.ie. Please refer to the Directors' Report later in this report which provides details about our structure, governance and management.

The Board of Directors' annual visits to services were again impacted due to the pandemic and these will be scheduled when it is safe to do so.

The Board of Directors reviewed compliance with the Charities Governance Code during the year and a Compliance Report outlining how the organisation complies with the 6 principles and 49 standards within the code was completed. One area identified for action was an external board evaluation and this process commenced in November 2021, with a completed evaluation report provided in January 2022. Recommendations from this report are currently under consideration by the Board of Directors.

I would like to welcome two new Directors, Dr. Nicola de Taranto and Mr. James McNabb, whose nominations, through the Family Forum, were ratified at the AGM in July 2021, in line with our Constitution. Sincere thanks to them and all Directors for their commitment and dedication to the children and adults we support.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Anthony O'Connor who retired as a long-serving Director in April 2021. Throughout Anthony's tenure he showed great commitment and drive to improve the quality of services for the people we support, and we are very grateful to him for his generous volunteerism over the years. I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank Mr. Darragh Sheehy, Ms. Denise Ryan and Mr. Kevin O Flatharta for their input, expertise and volunteerism with Ability West. They resigned their directorships in February, November and December 2021 respectively.

While our fundraising efforts were significantly hampered throughout the pandemic we took the opportunity to review the role and future of fundraising in Ability West. We have commenced rebuilding our fundraising programme for the coming years and we acknowledge everyone who supported us during 2021.

In 2022 we are celebrating the 60th anniversary of Ability West which is a significant milestone. We look forward to celebrating this special anniversary with service users, families, staff, volunteers and everyone who has and continues to support our work.

The work we do is very much strengthened by our many friends, supporters, volunteers and our statutory funders, including the Health Service Executive and the Departments of Education and Skills, and Social Protection. We are very appreciative of this support

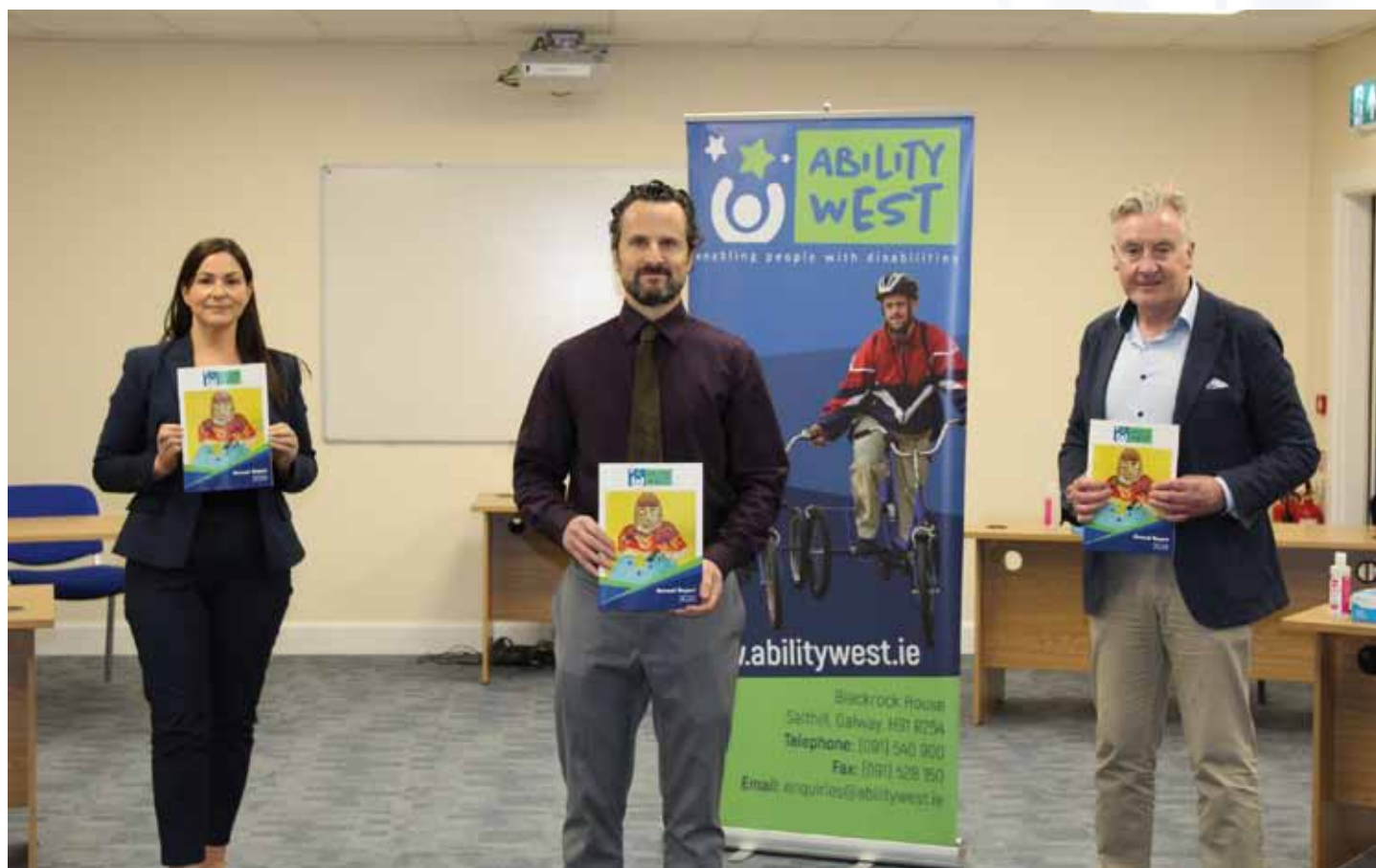
and on behalf of the Directors, I thank you all sincerely.

I would like to acknowledge my fellow Directors for their support and commitment and on behalf of the Directors, I would like to thank Audrey Pidgeon, Chief Executive, the Senior Management Team, and all staff for their hard work and dedication during what has been another very challenging year for service provision in Ability West.

Kevin Newell
Chairperson



Caroline Glynn, IDS-TILDA National Christmas Card Competition Winner



AGM 2021 l-r: Audrey Pidgeon, Chief Executive, Kevin Newell, Chairperson, and Dermot O'Neill, Company Secretary

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REVIEW OF 2021



Audrey Pidgeon, Chief Executive

I am proud to present the Ability West Annual Report for 2021. In this year, the pandemic continued to have a significant impact on the delivery of services, with only 'essential' services continuing into the early months of 2021. However, while service delivery was impacted, the supports and efforts of our staff teams were not. Staff continued to offer supports through innovative approaches, including remote supports and community based initiatives where access to on-site services was not possible.

The fall-out from the various waves of the pandemic presented serious challenges to the delivery of our services; teamwork came to the fore as staff worked incredibly hard to safely manage COVID-19 outbreaks in services, while also ensuring continuity of supports to people we support and staff. Our Critical Incident Response Team remained active throughout the year, with focus on reviewing and implementing guidance received from the Department of Health, HSE, and

Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) regarding infection prevention and control requirements in service provision.

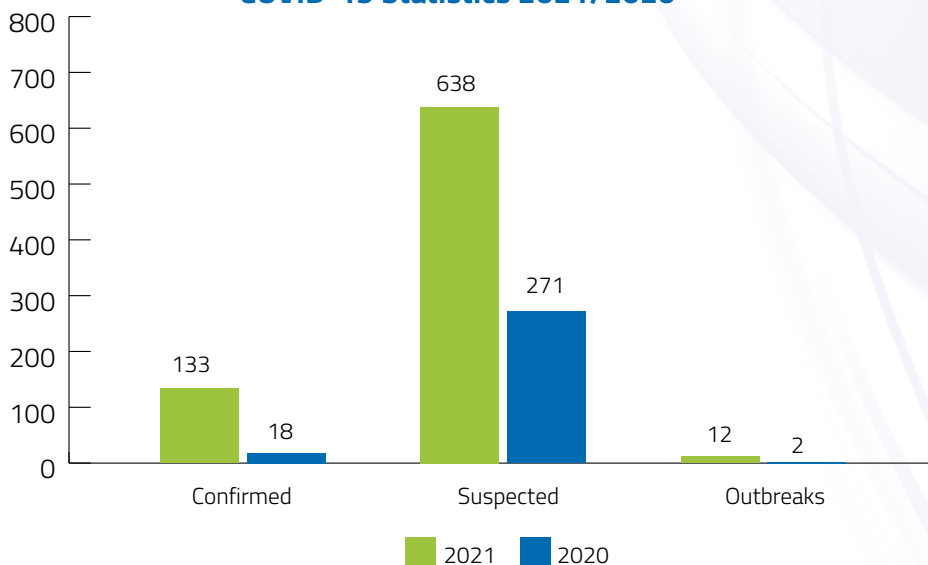
Ability West staff continued to go above and beyond the call of duty in the interest of the children and adults we support. For example, nurses working across services completed training in order to provide in-house COVID-19 testing. This new support reduced the dependency on accessing appointments in HSE Testing Centres, particularly at peak waves of the virus, and provided a more bespoke approach to testing for those who would have otherwise struggled to attend a large testing centre. I would like to take this opportunity to thank those nurses and administration staff who volunteered to facilitate the testing programme in Ability West, your support has been invaluable.

It was a relief when Ability West was included in the national vaccination programme, and we took up all available vaccination slots commencing in January 2021. The vaccination programme gave great hope and positivity to the people we support, their families and our staff and I am delighted to report that there was a significant take-up of vaccinations across these cohorts. Vaccines were prioritised for the most vulnerable people in our services initially, followed by those we support aged over 65 years, and then remaining staff and people we support. Later in 2021 a booster programme was rolled out by the HSE and similarly these were rolled out to people we support and staff.

There was a long awaited and very welcome return to day services from September 2021, although challenges remained in terms of transport (social distancing on buses) and maintaining social distancing in services while increasing capacity. Our risk assessment process ensured that we were increasing capacity in as safe a manner as possible, particularly in services where we have high numbers attending. As always, our frontline teams and managers responded positively to the challenges faced and service users were delighted to be back with their peers and enjoying life again.

Ability West services and teams experienced an unprecedented surge in COVID-19 suspected and confirmed cases from November onwards, and on-call teams were set-up to respond to the critical challenge of the pandemic and to avoid having to reduce service provision again. I am delighted to report that despite the significant challenges posed during this time we were successful in keeping on-site services open. Great credit is due to all our staff who worked hard throughout this past year, and in particular the latter months of 2021 and into the early months of 2022. Frontline and on-call teams put in significant hours and work, in addition to their existing workload, and I want to thank them sincerely for their dedication and commitment to the people we serve, alongside those staff who returned early from annual leave to support the on-call teams, deliver PPE stock, and provide testing over the Christmas and New Year period.

COVID-19 Statistics 2021/2020



The table above offers insight into the further pressures faced by Ability West during the pandemic in 2021. The number of confirmed cases refers to the number of individuals (staff and people we support) who tested positive for COVID-19 in 2020 (18) and 2021 (133). The number of suspected cases reported refers to how many people were required to self-isolate due to either being a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19 or displayed symptoms. There were 271 suspected cases in 2020 and 638 in 2021. Finally, the number of outbreaks declared in Ability West services increased from 2 in 2020 to 12 in 2021. Just to note the continued pressures in 2022, with 11 outbreaks declared during January and February alone in 2022.

Schools under the patronage of Ability West have also been significantly impacted by the pandemic with many pupils and their families suffering as a result of school/classroom closures due to outbreaks.

Despite the challenges of the pandemic which have continued into 2022, we continue to

maintain business as usual. An update on progress in relation to the Strategic Plan 2019-2023 is included under the Directors' Report. A copy of this plan is available on our website: www.abilitywest.ie.

The final core funding allocation from the HSE (Community Healthcare West) for 2021 was €30,484,539 which inter alia included: the full year effect of new funding provided in 2020, pay restoration, the provision of services for 2021 school leavers, new residential funding and sundry other funding adjustments. Additionally, we acknowledge the HSE's continued support for the provision of specific funding to alleviate the effects of the pandemic.

As has been the case for a number of years, Ability West continues to be challenged to meet the changing needs of people we support. This has been further compounded by the disruption on people and families when services were affected by COVID-19 restrictions, many of whom were already struggling prior to the pandemic. The area

of greatest need continues to be the complex support needs of children and adults who require more intensive services, and an increasing number of families who are struggling to provide this level of care in the family home. Ability West is also challenged to meet the needs of people in our services who are experiencing significant decline in mobility, cognitive changes and additional age-related conditions. This places a huge demand on our limited Multi-Disciplinary Team, waiting lists to access services, access to aids and equipment (e.g. wheelchairs), and the environments where we provide supports that need to be adapted to meet the needs of those who access our services. In addition to these challenges, Ability West is also faced with ever-increasing non-pay costs, most notably the rising cost of insurance, motor fuel, heating, electricity and the ongoing maintenance of our buildings and vehicles. We continue to utilise the OGP (Office of Government Procurement) Framework in order to achieve value for money on contracts such as: utility costs, hygiene and cleaning supplies among others.

Ability West was delighted to receive funding of €40,000 under the Strengthening Disability Services Fund for the development of sensory gardens in Holly Services (children's respite), Galway City, and St. Dymphna's Day Service, Portumna. Both projects will significantly enhance the experience of those who access these services. We have been allocated funding of €116,600 for new posts to support the delivery of the New Directions standards and Person Centred Planning framework in our day services and recruitment for these posts is underway.

Ability West achieved a better than break-even financial result in 2021 which was primarily due to the restricted service provision arising from the pandemic, and also once-off income received towards the latter end of the year. The financial statements for 2021 were completed using the Financial Reporting Standard FRS102 and drafted cognisant of the Charities SORP (Statement of Recommended Practice).

During 2021, Ability West provided increased levels of services across schools, day services, respite and residential services, albeit in various guises during the COVID-19 pandemic.

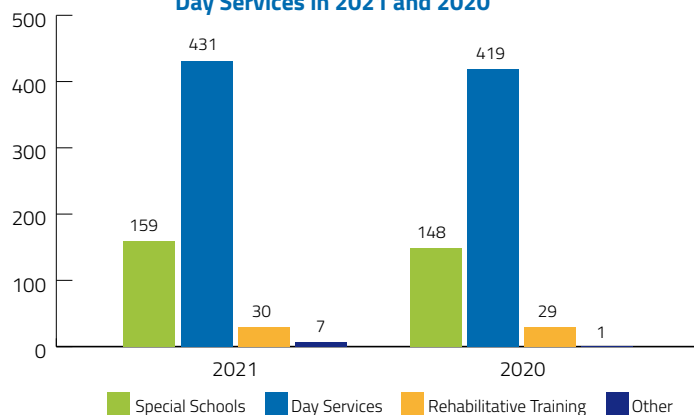
We welcomed new service users and staff in 2021 and we are delighted that they have settled in well in their respective placements and roles. We also said goodbye to a number of service users and staff and we wish them well in the future.

COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS

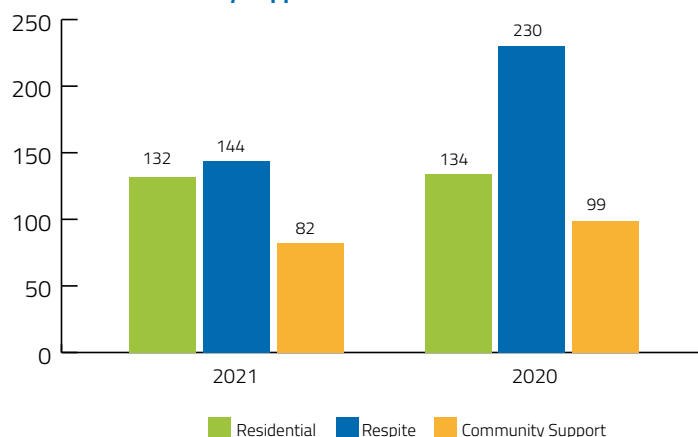
The Minister of State with responsibility for Public Health, Wellbeing and National Drugs Strategy, Frank Feighan TD, attended a presentation by Disability Federation of Ireland, GRETB (Galway Roscommon Education and Training Board), GRD (Galway Rural Development), Ability West, and Brothers of Charity Services Ireland – West Region, in September. This collaborative project, funded by Healthy Living Ireland, aimed to teach skills and promote healthy living. In particular the collaboration between disability service providers and the GRETB promoted links and positive relationships between services and mainstream education providers. Participants were supported to develop an understanding of nutrition and skills in cookery, food hygiene and budget management. Well done to all involved and thanks to Healthy Living Ireland for supporting this important collaboration.

As part of our ongoing collaboration with the NUIG Centre for Disability Law and Policy and Proactive Carers Group, Ability West applied to the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission's (IHREC's) Human Rights and Equality Grant Scheme 2021-22. We were successful in our application for funding for a 12 month project, with a working title of "What Happens When They Are Gone?" The research aims to document the experience of people with intellectual disabilities and their families in their search for housing and residential services, particularly as parents get older and have diminished capacity as carers.

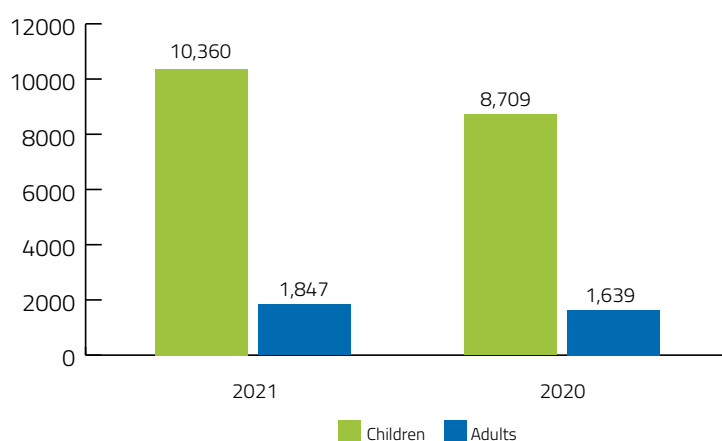
Number of Individuals in Schools and Day Services in 2021 and 2020



Number of Individuals availing of Respite, Residential and Community Support Services in 2021 and 2020



Residential Respite Nights provided in 2021 and 2020



Ability West participated in 'We Act', a national campaign to raise public awareness of the value and impact of the charity and community sector. It was executed by a Steering Group, made up of Volunteer Ireland, Disability Federation of Ireland, Boardmatch, Dóchas, Charities Institute Ireland and The Wheel. The campaign was about presenting the 'charity' sector as vibrant, diverse and working towards a shared goal of positive societal change. A video was developed depicting the 'Day in the Life' of five charity and community sector staff or volunteers and Janna Lindstrom, staff member, and a number of service users from Croílar were involved in the launch video and in an individual Ability West video). The aim of the campaign is to highlight the breadth of roles in the sector, and show all the different ways people can engage with it. It was a great opportunity to raise awareness about Ability West and the work that we do. Well done to Janna and everyone involved in Croílar.

PROGRESSING DISABILITY SERVICES

A significant change in the delivery of multi-disciplinary therapy services for children in schools (for whom we are patron) and respite services took effect from the end of 2021 with the roll-out of the Children's Disability Network Teams. Children's caseloads were handed over to the teams from November 2021 to end January 2022. Significant work was involved in ensuring the preparedness of this transition

and I would like to acknowledge all involved for their hard work and support. Communication from the HSE has been shared with families throughout the process and online sessions for families and special schools were held in recent months.

CAPITAL UPDATE

During 2021 we undertook essential maintenance and renovations on a number of our buildings which were funded from efficiencies achieved and ring-fenced fundraised monies. These inter alia included: installation of french doors in a number of bedrooms for emergency egress in residential services, renovation to toileting/showering facilities, kitchen replacements in residential services, and repurposing works to provide additional capacity in day services.

Every year we receive great support from participants on the Community Employment Scheme and Galway Rural Development's Rural Social and TÚS Schemes, and 2021 was no exception. They undertook external painting works, power washing of buildings and general maintenance. We acknowledge their assistance with this work, which is essential in the upkeep of our service locations.

NEW DAY SERVICE HUBS

Four new Day Service hubs were set up in Creggs, Portumna, Mountbellew and Tuam to accommodate a number of school leavers and I am pleased to advise that everyone has

settled in well. The hubs operate in line with the HSE's New Directions Interim Standards which embrace the premise of contribution and participation in the community. Well done to all involved in setting up these new services and best wishes to everyone availing of services in the hubs.

An official opening of the Portumna Hub was held in November and it was a lovely opportunity to celebrate the occasion with the service users, families, staff and stakeholders. We were delighted that Minister for Disability, Anne Rabbitte TD, officially opened the hub; we were also joined by representatives from the HSE, Chief Officer, Breda Crehan-Roche, and General Manager for Disability Services, Alma Joyce, and Brothers of Charity Services Ireland – West Region Director of Services, Eamon Loughrey. Thanks to all involved for celebrating this occasion with us.

NEW RESIDENTIAL SERVICE

Funding for a new residential service for four young adults was received from the HSE. We were fortunate to identify and purchase a property in Galway City which underwent significant refurbishment in late 2021 and into 2022. The new service will be operational in April, once the HIQA registration process has been concluded. Given the current housing crisis, it is becoming increasingly difficult to source suitable properties to meet the needs of the people we support, so we are delighted that this house will meet the needs of these individuals for many years.



Portumna Hub Opening: Minister for Disability, Anne Rabbitte, cutting the ribbon at the opening of the Portumna Hub in November 2021

TRANSPORT

During the year new vehicles were added to our fleet for Clochan and Fairview services. The purchase of same was possible through a combination of efficiencies achieved and funds raised/donated. Ability West also submitted applications for Clár Funding for new buses for our Mountbellew and Grange View Services which were approved and these vehicles were delivered during the year.



Aerial view of St. Oliver's Special School, Tuam

SPECIAL SCHOOLS

A new school building for St. Oliver's Special School, Tuam, was completed in March and the school opened in April 2021. It is an expansive building with state-of-the-art features that enable inclusivity, accessibility and person-centred learning experiences. Congratulations

to all involved and we wish the pupils many happy years of learning and growth in this lovely environment.

As patron of St. Teresa's Special School, Ballinasloe, we were delighted to meet with An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin TD, Minister for Education and Skills, Norma Foley TD and Minister

for Disability, Anne Rabbitte TD, in November 2021. Funding for a new school building for St. Teresa's was announced which is essential to support the pupils attending this school. We look forward to this development in the coming years.



Taoiseach Micheál Martin and Minister Anne Rabbitte visiting St. Teresa's Special School in Ballinasloe

VOLUNTEERS

We continued to have an active volunteer programme with many volunteers supporting virtual events for individuals at home to ensure that connections were kept alive. Lots of fun sessions and classes were held over Zoom but there is nothing like the real thing and we look forward to a return to in-person events in 2022. The Best Buddies College Committees remained committed to the programme and an update on this is provided later in this report. Sincere thanks to all our volunteers for their commitment and dedication to the children and adults we support.

EXTERNAL THIRD PARTY ACCREDITATION

I.S.EN 9001:2015

Ability West has a Quality Management System aligned to this standard. An audit took place in May 2021 and we maintain accreditation with this ISO standard. The Auditor was particularly complimentary about our risk management approaches,

quality management systems and overall governance and management. A further audit by the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) is expected in 2022.

Excellence Through People 1000:2017

Ability West was audited by NSAI in March 2021 and we maintained Gold Standard accreditation with this ISO standard. Well done to everyone involved, and particular thanks to Cathal Esler, Director of Human Resources, and his team who assisted with the audit. A further audit will be held in April 2022.

Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA)

Ability West had 29 designated centres registered with HIQA, i.e. residential and respite services, which reduced to 28 centres in 2021. Oak Services Designated Centre transferred its HIQA Registration to another service provider in September 2021 following a planned transition. Ability West's designated centres go through a re-registration process (every three years) and I am pleased to report that all

designated centres have been re-registered by HIQA. Sincere thanks to the Persons in Charge, their teams, and staff from Client Services, Finance, Human Resources and Quality and Compliance, who all contribute towards compliance with the national standards. Further detail is provided later in the Quality and Compliance Report.

ISO 31000:2018

Ability West has aligned its risk management processes to this standard which provides a framework for integrated risk management.

QQI Accreditation for Trainees

St. Joseph's Training Services, which includes all locations of rehabilitative training in Ability West, is accredited to provide QQI programmes to service users availing of our three year training programme. Despite the pandemic a total of 76 portfolios, covering Levels 1 and 2, were submitted for trainees and all were successful, in either major or minor certifications. Well done to all involved. You will see an update on our training services later in this report.

ADVOCACY COUNCIL

The Advocacy Council continued to meet in 2021, albeit in a virtual environment. The Senior Management Team and I met with council representatives to discuss challenges, new proposals and ideas. Many thanks to newly appointed Chairperson, Stephen Joyce, and to the council members for their continued work in promoting choice for individuals availing of our services. Thank you also to the Advocacy Council Facilitators, John Howard and Shane Scanlon, for their commitment to improving the lives of people we support.

OUTLOOK FOR 2022

This year Ability West is celebrating 60 years of service provision in Galway. In November 1962, a public meeting was held following which a committee was elected with their first objective to fundraise for school accommodation for children with mental handicap as it was then known. In those early days, significant fundraising was undertaken and grant applications submitted to seek funding to support a new school which opened in 1964 for 12 pupils. The organisation grew from there to its current provision of services to 630 children and adults, in 62 centres across the city and county. It is only fitting that we acknowledge those early and successive leaders and all who have contributed to the growth and success of the organisation over 60 years and we will mark this special occasion with a number of events during the year.

Ability West has a Human Rights Committee and Restrictive Practices Committee and work was undertaken in 2021 with regard to the potential merger of these two committees which is ongoing. I would like



Noel Grealish TD pictured with CEO, Audrey Pidgeon, when they met to discuss challenges and unmet needs in Ability West

to acknowledge and thank Mr. John O'Dea who chaired our Human Rights Committee for eight years until January 2021, and was a member of the committee for ten years. John's experience, empathy and person-centredness was vital to the work of this committee. I would also like to welcome new Chairperson, Dr. Áine Sperrin (NUI Galway Centre for Disability Law & Policy), who brings a wealth of experience to this role and will guide the merger of both committees in 2022.

In June 2022, we will see the commencement of the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015 which is a welcome development for people in our services. The act replaces two laws in relation to decision-making capacity that have been in place since the 19th century. These are the Marriage of Lunatics Act 1811 and the Lunacy Regulation (Ireland) Act 1871. The Act establishes a modern legal

framework to support decision-making by adults who may have difficulty making decisions without help. It introduces three types of support arrangements for people who currently, or may shortly, face challenges when making certain decisions. It also provides for people who wish to plan ahead for a time in the future when they might lose capacity, by way of an advance healthcare directive, or enduring power of attorney.

We undertook training with senior/middle managers in October 2021 and a robust implementation plan has been developed. An information meeting with the Decision Support Service was held virtually in November and it is acknowledged that there will be significant training and support required for people we support, families and staff in relation to this legislation over the next year.

2022 also sees the commencement of a significant 5-year pilot project to establish proactive pathways to housing and residential services for adults with intellectual disability. Ability West is collaborating with the Brothers of Charity Services Ireland – West Region, Proactive Carers Galway and the HSE in this ambitious project, which aims to establish a proactive and planned approach to residential supports and services and as a result intends to reduce the likelihood of crisis residential referrals. Huge thanks to Proactive Carers Galway, Brothers of Charity Services Ireland – West Region, Cathy McGrath of Disability Federation of Ireland and the HSE for the collaboration to date on this project.

BEREAVEMENTS

In 2021 we mourned the passing of four people we support: Ann Marie Ward, Rita Coyne, Michael Sullivan and Bridget Molloy. Sadly, to February 2022, there have been three service users bereavements: Mary B. King, Mary Crehan and

Padraig Kelly. Many people we support, their families, staff, board members and volunteers also experienced bereavements and we extend our deepest sympathies to them. May they all rest in peace.

CONCLUSION

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our Chairperson, Kevin Newell, and the Board Members for their continued support and guidance. I would like to acknowledge the children and adults supported by Ability West, their parents, carers, and families for their ongoing co-operation particularly during these past two years which have been difficult for all. Thanks to the Directors and Assistant Directors of Client Services, Finance and Human Resources, Department Heads, Managers, Unit Directors, all staff, participants on the Community Employment Scheme, Galway Rural Development's RSS and TUS schemes, and all volunteers for their huge contributions to our services in 2021. Your

commitment and dedication is, as always, very much acknowledged and appreciated.

I would also like to thank the HSE, in particular Breda Crehan-Roche, Chief Officer, Community Healthcare West; John Fitzmaurice, Head of Disability Services, General Manager, Alma Joyce, Disability Managers, Aoife O'Donohue and Mary O'Donnell, and Head of Finance, Liam Fogarty, and their respective teams who provide ongoing support and assistance to Ability West. I would like to also thank the Community Healthcare West Public Health team who have provided great support to us over the past year. Thanks also to the many statutory, non-statutory and voluntary service providers that we work with for their ongoing co-operation and assistance.

Audrey Pidgeon
Chief Executive



In September 2021 staff and service users met with Mr. Frank Feighan, Minister of State with responsibility for Public Health, Well Being and National Drugs Strategy, as part of the Healthy Ireland Campaign

DIRECTORS' REPORT



AGM 2021 l-r: Audrey Pidgeon, Chief Executive, Dermot Callanan, FCC Chartered Accountants & Auditors, Kevin Newell, Chairperson, Mick Finnerty, Board Member, Dermot O'Neill, Company Secretary, and John McHugo, Director of Finance

COMPANY STRUCTURE

Ability West is a company limited by guarantee and not having a share capital; and is also a registered charity.

Ability West has a Constitution which outlines how Directors are elected and co-opted to the Board. All co-opted Directors have a maximum term of

office of nine years, i.e. three consecutive terms of three years. Elected Directors have a one year term which is being reviewed in order to align with other co-opted Directors. The right mix of skills and experience is considered for the composition of the Board to ensure its effectiveness as a Board and that it is representative of stakeholders' interests.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2021



*Mr. Kevin Newell,
Chairperson*



*Mr. Dermot O'Neill,
Company Secretary*



Dr. Nicola de Taranto



Ms. Breda Dolan



Mr. Mick Finnerty



Mr. Cormac Flynn



Mr. Sean McGrath



Mr. James McNabb



Mrs. Mary O'Mahony

Mr. Kevin Newell,
Chairperson and Co-opted Director

Dr. Nicola de Taranto,
Elected Director (appointed June 2021)

Ms. Breda Dolan,
Co-opted Director

Mr. Michael (Mick) Finnerty,
Co-opted Director

Mr. Cormac Flynn,
Co-opted Director

Mr. Sean McGrath,
Co-opted Director

Mr. James McNabb,
Elected Director (appointed June 2021)

Mr. Anthony O'Connor,
Co-opted Director (retired April 2021)

Mr. Kevin Flaherty (Ó Flatharta),
Co-opted Director (retired December 2021)

Mrs. Mary O'Mahony,
Co-opted Director

Mr. Dermot O'Neill,
Company Secretary, and Co-opted Director

Mrs. Denise Ryan,
Co-opted Director (resigned November 2021)

Mr. Darragh Sheehy,
Co-opted Director (resigned February 2021)

During 2021 the Board of Directors met 10 times, attendance was recorded as follows:

NAME	Jan	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Kevin Newell	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓
Nicola de Taranto	<i>Appointed 14/06/2021</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Breda Dolan	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Mick Finnerty	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓
Cormac Flynn	X	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	X	✓	X
Sean McGrath	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
James McNabb	<i>Appointed 14/06/2021</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Anthony O'Connor	X	X	X	<i>Retired 30/04/2021</i>						
Kevin Ó Flatharta	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mary O'Mahony	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dermot O'Neill	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓
Denise Ryan	✓	✓	X	X	✓	✓	X	X	<i>Resigned 12/11/2021</i>	
Darragh Sheehy	✓	<i>Resigned 12/02/2021</i>								

The Chief Executive is not a member of the Board, and both the Chief Executive and the Recording Secretary are recorded as 'in attendance' at Board meetings.

Each Board meeting agenda has standing items which inter alia include: Declaration of Conflict of Interest/Loyalty, Minutes, Matters Arising, Chairperson's Business, Chief Executive's Report, Financial Update, Appointments/Remuneration and Any Other Business. Other items are added to the agenda depending on business requirements at any given time.

The Board of Directors ensures that the vision, mission and core values of the organisation are upheld and realised through our strategic plan and service plans. The Board is collectively responsible for the operations of the organisation

and devolves responsibility for the conduct of business to the Chief Executive, who in turn delegates through the line management structure. The Chief Executive accounts for her stewardship of the organisation at each Board meeting.

Within the Board's broad governance role there are a number of specific roles that are exercised, including: approval of the strategic plan, preparation of annual financial statements, and reporting to members at the AGM. The reserved functions of the Board are: the recruitment and appointment of the Chief Executive, approval of the annual budget, policy approval, acquisition and disposal of company assets, and overall corporate governance.

The Board of Directors is supported by a committee structure which deals effectively with specific aspects of the company. These are:

AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE

PURPOSE	MEMBERSHIP	APR	JUL	NOV
The role of this committee is to ensure that effective arrangements are in place for governance, risk management and internal control within the organisation. Membership consists of Board and former Board Members and external, independent members. These meetings are held biannually or as required.	Jack King, Chairperson	✓	✓	✓
	Kevin Flavin, Secretary	✓	✓	✓
	Cormac Flynn	✓	✓	✓
	Gerry Walsh	✓	✓	✓

FINANCE COMMITTEE

PURPOSE	MEMBERSHIP	MAY	JUL	SEP	NOV
The role of this committee is to keep the financial management of Ability West under review. Membership consists of Board and former Board Members and members of the Senior Management Team.	Dermot O'Neill, Chairperson	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Breda Dolan	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Páraic Lawless	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Audrey Pidgeon	✓	✓	✓	✓
	John McHugo	✓	✓	✓	✓

NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

PURPOSE	MEMBERSHIP	FEB	JUL	NOV
This committee is tasked with the core responsibilities of managing the recruitment and appointment of new Board Members, and succession planning for the Board of Directors, cognisant of diversity in terms of gender, skills and areas of competency. These meetings are held as required.	Kevin Newell, Chairperson	✓	✓	X
	Cormac Flynn	✓	✓	✓
	Dermot O'Neill	✓	✓	✓
	Audrey Pidgeon (in attendance)	✓	✓	✓

QUALITY AND SAFETY BOARD COMMITTEE

PURPOSE	MEMBERSHIP	MAR	OCT
<p>This committee oversees the development of the quality and safety programme by the executive/Senior Management Team; ensures policies and processes clearly articulate responsibility, authority and accountability for quality, safety and risk management across the service; secures assurance from the executive/Senior Management Team on the implementation of the quality and safety programme and the application of appropriate governance structure and processes, for example: risk escalation, including monitored outcomes through quality indicators and outcome measures; secures assurance from the executive/Senior Management Team that Ability West is conforming with all regulatory and legal requirements to assure quality, safety and risk management. These meetings are held biannually.</p>	Kevin Newell, Chairperson	✓	✓
	Nicola de Taranto	-	X
	Breda Dolan	✓	✓
	Michael Finnerty	✓	✓
	Cormac Flynn	✓	X
	Sean McGrath	✓	✓
	James McNabb	-	✓
	Anthony O'Connor	X	-
	Kevin Ó Flatharta	✓	✓
	Mary O'Mahony	✓	✓
	Dermot O'Neill	✓	X
	Denise Ryan	✓	X
	Darragh Sheehy	✓	X
	Audrey Pidgeon	✓	✓
	Eileen Costello-Conneely	✓	X
	Cathal Esler	✓	✓
	Orla Haddigan	✓	-
John McHugo	✓	X	
Emer Power	-	✓	
Pat Tyrrell	-	✓	

VISITING COMMITTEE

PURPOSE	MEMBERSHIP
<p>This committee's role is to visit all services provided by Ability West. It provides an opportunity for Board Members to see our services (facilities) and to engage with service users, managers and staff. A report highlighting various aspects of each service and service delivery is provided to the Chief Executive, so that any issues raised during visits receive attention. Reports are provided to all Board Members and these are reviewed at the following Board meeting with any feedback being provided by the Chief Executive. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, visits were suspended in 2021. It is envisaged that visits will recommence in 2022.</p>	All Board Members

EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE



**Audrey Pidgeon,
Chief Executive**



**Cathal Esler,
Director of Human
Resources**



**John McHugo,
Director of Finance**



**Pat Tyrrell,
Director of Client
Services**

The executive management in Ability West comprises of the Chief Executive and the Senior Management Team, the members are as follows:

Chief Executive, Audrey Pidgeon

Director of Client Services, Pat Tyrrell (appointed May 2021)

Interim Director of Client Services, Orla Haddigan (January 2020 – April 2021)

Director of Finance, John McHugo

Director of Human Resources, Cathal Esler

Recording Secretary, Carol A. Browne

The Board of Directors meets with the Senior Management Team biannually to discuss various aspects of operations and service delivery along with reviewing the Corporate Risk Register and progress on the Strategic Plan 2019-2023.



David McGrath, St. Joseph's Training Centre

STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Constitution

Ability West is a not-for-profit organisation providing services and supports to over 600 children and adults with intellectual disability across Galway City and County.

There have been no changes to the principle objectives since the last Directors' Report.

Appointment of Directors

The first Family Forum each year will nominate two unrelated family representatives to the Board, taking into consideration the skill mix of the Board and the expertise required. Both individuals will meet the criteria of 'family member' as defined under the Constitution. A 'family member' means the parent, grandparent, legal guardian, sibling, spouse of a sibling, child of a sibling, aunt, uncle, spouse of an aunt or uncle, or child of an aunt or uncle of a service user. The nominees are formally elected at the AGM in accordance with the Articles of Association. Other Directors are co-opted having regard to the optimum skill-mix and expertise of the Board.

Recruitment, Induction and Training of Directors

The Board of Directors, supported by the Nominations Committee, has been actively renewing its membership over the past few years, taking into account a balance of the abilities needed to tackle the wide-ranging responsibilities of the Board. Cognisant of this, the existing Board Members' skill mix comprises of expertise in technology, construction, engineering, finance, education (intellectual disability), management and marketing. Given the voluntary nature of the

role, Ability West has recruited new Directors through Volunteer Galway and Boardmatch.

Comprehensive induction training is provided for new Directors upon commencement of their term in office. This training inter alia includes: briefing on the Constitution and company structure, the Strategic Plan, Corporate and Clinical Governance, Charities Governance Code, Guidance for Charity Trustees (Charities Regulator), Code of Conduct for Board Members, and Conflict of Interest/Loyalty Policy.

The Code of Conduct is reviewed, approved and signed off annually by the Board of Directors. Additional training (in-house/ courses/webinars) is also provided to Directors and in 2021 a number of Directors completed training which included Board Roles and Responsibilities (Carmichael).

Organisational Structure and Decision Making

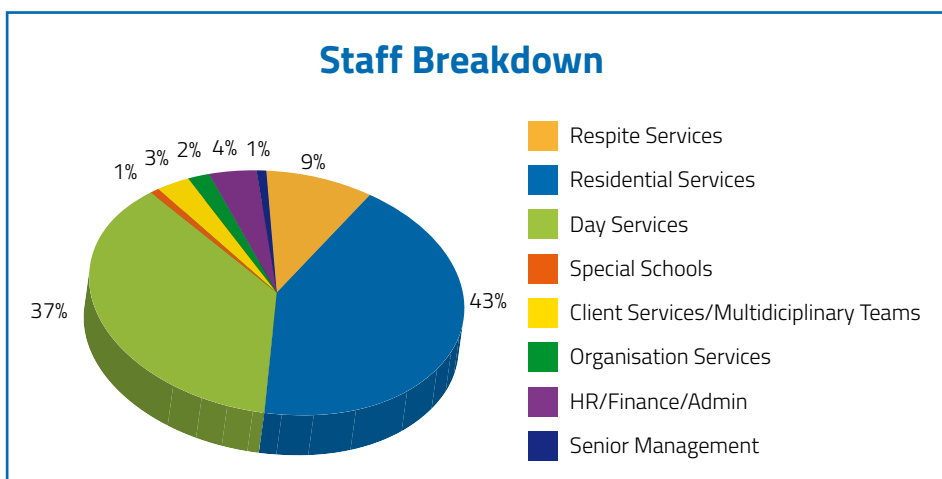
Ability West is governed by the Board of Directors who are elected in accordance with the company's Constitution. The Directors are non-executive members of the company, who receive no remuneration for their services, and they represent diverse skills, expertise and backgrounds. The Board of Directors meets 10 times per year and collectively has non-executive responsibility for how the organisation operates presently and what it achieves over the long-term.

The Board of Directors delegates the day to day management of Ability West to the Chief Executive, who is in turn supported by a tiered management system that identifies clear lines of accountability and responsibility at each level.

The Board recognises the value of high standards of corporate governance and to this end is supported by various Board Committees. These committees are responsible for overseeing particular aspects of the work of the company and report directly to the Board.

Ability West recruits suitably qualified staff for positions within our service to ensure that high quality service provision is maintained. Our service delivery is based on a Social Care service provision methodology. Adherence to legislative requirements and best practice; particularly in the areas of equality and equal opportunities, records management, Garda vetting, accreditation and qualification validation where applicable, are important aspects of our recruitment function.

Ability West has a vibrant volunteer programme which augments the programmes delivered in our services. Volunteers undergo a comprehensive screening and training process. There is an update on volunteers later in this report.



Risk Management

The Directors have assessed the major risks to which the company is exposed, in particular those related to its operations and finances, and are satisfied that systems and procedures are in place to mitigate exposure to major risk. Management of risk is viewed by the Board as a corporate governance priority and the company has a robust Integrated Risk Management Policy and Procedure in place which is reviewed every three years, or more frequently if required. This policy was most recently revised and approved by the Board of Directors in November 2020. The Directors review the Corporate Risk Register at least four times a year, or more frequently if required.

The company's internal control systems are supported by policies, procedures, protocols and guidelines covering all aspects of the work of the organisation.

Governance, Standards and Compliance

The Board of Directors reviewed its compliance with the Charities Governance Code at meetings held in September and December 2021. The Charities Regulator's Compliance Record Form was completed and our compliance notified to the Charities Regulator.

Ability West is committed to complying with the Guidelines for Charitable Organisations Fundraising from the Public which was issued by the Charities Regulator in 2017. A number of robust policies and procedures were developed to support fundraising and these are reviewed every three years, or more frequently if required. Ability West complies with the Charities Institutes Ireland 'Triple Lock Standards' ensuring transparent reporting, good fundraising and governance.

Ability West is registered on the Register of Lobbying which is maintained by the Standards in Public Office Commission and we

complied with the submission of lobbying returns during 2021.

A Central Register of Beneficial Ownership was established in 2019 as a further measure to assist combatting money-laundering and terrorist financing. Ability West filed our beneficial ownership information on the Central Register, which is maintained by the Registrar of Companies, and we continue to update this register as relevant.

Ability West is registered as an Approved Housing Body (AHB). The Approved Housing Bodies Regulatory Authority (AHBRA) was established in February 2021. AHBRA is tasked with providing the regulation of Approved Housing Bodies for the purposes of protecting housing assets provided by AHBs. The Regulator will have responsibility for overseeing the effective governance of all voluntary and co-operative housing bodies, in accordance with the legal framework set out in the Housing (Regulation of Approved Housing Bodies) Act 2019. The four standards of Governance, Financial Management, Property and Asset Management, and Tenancy Management are due to be released in early 2022 with guidance on the standards to follow. The standards outline the key outcomes that AHBs are required to achieve in relation to membership, roles and responsibilities, procedures for decision-making, control and oversight, conflicts of interest, code of conduct, effective governing, accountability, honesty, integrity and risk management. A significant amount of work is ongoing to align Ability West to the standards.

During 2021 the Board of Directors completed the Health Service Executive's (HSE) Annual Compliance Statement for Section 39 funded agencies in respect of 2020. This statement was signed by the Chairperson and one Board Member and submitted to the HSE in advance of the end of May deadline. The Annual Compliance

Statement for 2021 is due for submission by the end of May 2022.

The Annual Financial Monitoring Report for 2020 was completed and signed by the Chief Executive and the Director of Finance and submitted to the HSE in July 2021. The 2021 report will be submitted to the HSE before end of May 2022.

The annual budget is approved by the Board of Directors. Management accounts, including comparisons with the annual budget programme, are reported to the Board on a regular basis by the Chairperson of the Finance Committee. The approval of staff appointments/remuneration is a standing item on Board Meeting agendas.

It is Ability West's policy that all staff and volunteers, including members of the Board, operate subject to best practice recruitment policies and Garda vetting procedures. All staff and volunteers are made aware of their responsibilities to protect those they support through adherence to national policies, e.g. Children First and Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse. Ability West implements the processes and systems of the HSE's National Safeguarding Policy to ensure that individuals availing of our services are educated and protected from all forms of abuse. The company has a 'zero tolerance' approach to any form of abuse and promotes a culture which supports this ethos.

Ability West has a robust performance management process for all staff. Performance objectives/KPIs are agreed at the start of each year. Two staff development/support meetings are used to manage performance thereafter, before a formal end of year review of performance against the original objectives set is held. Performance Improvement Plans (PIPs) are introduced where a staff member's work falls below expected standards. The objective of PIPs is to formalise and support the employee back to the expected standard.

STRATEGIES FOR ACHIEVING OBJECTIVES IN OUR STRATEGIC PLAN 2019-2023

Our strategic plan provides a roadmap for services, supports and the organisational development of Ability West. It outlines the destination that we wish the organisation to arrive at in 2023. The plan will ensure that Ability West is best placed to achieve our vision and mission in the most effective, efficient, fair, equitable and person-centred manner.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on a number of goals within the plan, e.g. sustainable resources and community inclusion, however, work has been undertaken to reimagine fundraising post COVID-19 and also the opening up of society in the context of restrictions being lifted.

There are eight strategic goals in our current plan:



PROGRESS ON ACHIEVING THE OBJECTIVES OF THESE GOALS IS AS FOLLOWS:

Goals	Aims/Outcomes	2019	2020	2021
Organisation's Culture	<p>Role model the values of Ability West in all our work.</p> <p>Audit the culture of our services to ensure that we are delivering on our ethos.</p>	<p>A culture audit was completed and a new policy implemented.</p> <p>Monthly employee recognition programme commenced.</p>	<p>Due to unprecedented demands on service planning and delivery, it was not possible to reassess the audit. However, there is ample evidence through our work and actions across our services that the values have been very strong this year in our frontline services, staff and management.</p>	<p>Targeted planning was undertaken and implementation of a series of Focus Groups inclusive of all staff and locations with a view to getting staff feedback on the organisational culture experienced in the workplace. An outcome report will follow in 2022, to be presented to the Senior Management Team.</p>

Goals	Aims/Outcomes	2019	2020	2021
Change Management	<p>Ensure that services and supports reflect best practice and are underpinned by person-centredness, individualisation, choice and self-determination.</p> <p>To utilise person centred planning to inform and mould our model of service delivery so that meeting individuals' preferences and needs is central to service planning and delivery.</p> <p>Ensure we have the ability to be flexible, nimble and adaptive in meeting the requirements and changing needs of the people we support.</p> <p>Be a learning organisation, with ongoing development informed by need and anticipated demand.</p>	<p>Policy reviewed to define Person Centred Planning (PCP).</p> <p>KPIs established, audit tool developed and audit commenced in 2019.</p> <p>Analysis of PCPs to inform PCP process going forward.</p> <p>Trends of needs identified in day, residential and respite services. Future needs to be identified through schools/school age teams.</p> <p>Changing needs of service users identified on an ongoing basis and business cases as relevant submitted to the HSE.</p> <p>Mandatory training targets monitored and met through 2019.</p>	<p><i>Re-shaping Day Services Framework</i></p> <p>A working group has been established to review the re-shaping of services and the ways to best meet people's needs.</p> <p><i>Respite and Home Sharing Structure</i></p> <p>A review of the structure of respite, short breaks, community support and home sharing was undertaken. The existing team is effective and fit for purpose. Additional funding for a new project 'Realóg' was received from the HSE in 2020; this provides in-home and community support for a period of time for families in need of additional support due to complex support needs.</p>	<p>Successful reconfiguration of some day services was achieved in 2021, including the continuation of a Genio-funded project, Supported Self-Directed Living (SSDL).</p> <p>Significant work was undertaken as part of Progressing Disability Services and the transfer of children's caseloads to the Children's Disability Network Teams.</p> <p>2-day training workshop on the Assisted Decision Making Act (ADMA) was delivered to Senior and Middle Management Teams, followed by a planning day and the creation of a Strategic Legislation Implementation Plan. This is in preparation for the full implementation of ADMA in 2022.</p> <p>Realóg continued and additional resources secured to provide additional respite for adults, and to respond to the changing needs in children's respite, in partnership with the HSE.</p> <p>Through collaboration with Proactive Carers Galway, Brothers of Charity Services Ireland – West Region, Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI), a budget proposal was submitted to the HSE and Minister for Disabilities. The proposal detailed a significant 5-year pilot that would provide a proactive and planned pathway to residential services for people with intellectual disability and aligns with Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).</p>

Goals	Aims/Outcomes	2019	2020	2021
Effective Teams	<p>Implement performance management throughout the organisation.</p> <p>Invest in training and ongoing development of staff.</p> <p>Develop a staff wellbeing strategy.</p> <p>Celebrate and disseminate good practices and good news stories.</p>	<p>New performance appraisal process rolled out in first full cycle of performance management process.</p> <p>Wellbeing strategy developed reflective of best practice within resources available in order to enhance employee wellbeing; Wellbeing Team established and wellbeing initiatives rolled out during 2019.</p> <p>Three employees sponsored to undergo Social Care degree programmes.</p> <p>Launch of publications and sharing good news stories/ achievements across services, via circulars, and all digital platforms.</p>	<p><i>Online Training</i></p> <p>A significant amount of mandatory training was moved online to protect employees' health and safety, and also ensure that we could meet our training requirements.</p> <p>Planning has commenced to introduce an online induction course for new employees.</p> <p>Additional work on re-organising services, ongoing risk assessment and management, updating health and safety guidelines and individualising them to specific teams and services has put significant pressure on teams who are already busy with the usual day-to-day service operations and compliance. A review is currently underway of capacity in other teams to release people to assist where needed in order to support teams to remain effective in the current pandemic and to protect their health and wellbeing.</p>	<p>A number of temporary online training courses were embedded as standard practice this year, delivering efficiencies.</p> <p>New consolidated induction training week for new employees was implemented, scheduled every second month.</p> <p>A number of wellbeing offerings were made available to employees.</p> <p>Successfully brought Core Personnel and Payroll applications from back office to portal platform in a major HRIS upgrade project.</p> <p>Successfully upgraded our HRIS reporting tool to Core Insights.</p> <p>Ongoing individual support for study and further education courses applied for by staff.</p>

Goals	Aims/Outcomes	2019	2020	2021
Meaningful Outcomes	<p>Implement holistic quality person-centred plans that are meaningful and enable the person to achieve their goals and ambitions.</p> <p>Encourage and enable people to participate in community activities and contribute in a meaningful way to the wider society and environment.</p> <p>Enable people to have positive relationships, stay connected to their families and community.</p>	<p>Individuals are supported with their PCP, and audit of PCP in progress.</p> <p>School leaver process reviewed and a day service review commenced in 2019.</p> <p>New Transition Support Plan with a focus on developing relationships – pilot with school leavers.</p>	<p><i>Re-imagining Person-Centred Plans</i></p> <p>A review of Person-Centred Plans in all services in light of the COVID-19 pandemic was completed, to ensure that outcomes remain meaningful.</p> <p>A bid for funding was successful under the 'Strengthening Disability Services Fund' for a consultation on person-centred practice in Ability West services. This funding will provide for an audit of person-centred practice in our services, develop a renewed approach to same with an accompanying software tool for monitoring purposes, and training across staff teams. A Project Manager will be recruited on a temporary basis to oversee the co-ordination of the project and to establish systems that will sustain the learning achieved in our services.</p> <p><i>Modes of communication to maintain relationships</i></p> <p>Planning for an Ireland-USA Pen Pal initiative for people of our services and those of NAPD commenced.</p>	<p>Scoping exercise was completed on an organisation-wide approach to Person Centred Practice, with a focus on software tool development. This forms part of a two-year project funded by the Strengthening Disability Services Fund.</p>

Goals	Aims/Outcomes	2019	2020	2021
Community Inclusion	<p>Continue to grow our volunteer and friendship opportunities.</p> <p>Provide opportunities for people to use their gifts and abilities, enhancing experiences – happiness, pride and a sense of belonging.</p> <p>Build community partnerships that are positive and create value.</p> <p>Lobby for change at local, regional and national level so that people can take their rightful place in society free from barriers and enjoy equal citizenship.</p>	<p>Continued roll-out of the Best Buddies programme and volunteer events.</p> <p><i>Employment path for people with disability.</i></p> <p>Recruitment to AW receptionist role.</p> <p>Engagement with the National Federation of Voluntary Service Providers through its various committees, fora and national campaigns;</p> <p>Robust budget campaign in advance of Budget 2020;</p> <p>Represented at the HSE Strategic Leadership Group (Springtime Children’s Services) to represent the needs of children availing of our services;</p> <p>Engagement with the HSE Head of Disability and General Manager for Disability Services.</p> <p>Quality and Compliance Membership on Disability Federation of Ireland HIQA Forum Representative Group – seek to influence policy development.</p> <p>Manager of Ancillary Services on the Galway County Council Disability Housing Strategy Group.</p>	<p><i>Engage with National Federation of Voluntary Service Providers and other relevant fora.</i></p> <p>Expression of interest submitted to join the Board of the National Federation of Voluntary Service Providers.</p> <p>Ongoing engagement with the Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) and Proactive Carers Group. Ability West is the proposed named Enterprise Mentor for a PhD study on access to residential services for people with intellectual disabilities under Article 19 of the UNCRPD.</p> <p><i>Increased community partnership</i></p> <p>Ability West engaged with a local service in Portumna who have offered the use of their community building to extend the delivery of day services during the pandemic.</p>	<p>Consideration of opportunities to build upon existing Best Buddies College Programme to a ‘Best Buddies Citizens’ Programme, which is inclusive of older age groups.</p> <p>Successful recruitment process and appointment as part of an employment pathway for people with intellectual disability.</p> <p>Lobbying for change continued with local and national representatives and through active engagement and contribution to disability umbrella groups (National Federation of Voluntary Service Providers and Disability Federation of Ireland).</p> <p>Funding secured from Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) to undertake a 1-year research project with regards to Article 19 (Independent Living & Inclusion in Community) of the UNCRPD.</p> <p>Capital development planning in local communities. Four new hubs opened across Galway City and County.</p> <p>Delivery of SSDL programme to 10 people who access Ability West services (Genio project).</p>

Goals	Aims/Outcomes	2019	2020	2021
Secure Sustainable Resources	<p>We will work to secure sustainable resources on an ongoing basis.</p> <p>Maximise our profile, explore and target income diversification.</p> <p>Obtain best value in all our dealings.</p>	<p>Ongoing work with economies achieved.</p> <p>E-tendering ongoing.</p>	<p><i>Income Diversification</i></p> <p>Worked with external consultant to develop a new community fundraising strategy for Ability West.</p> <p><i>Fostering relationships with HSE, NFVSP, etc.</i></p> <p>Continued fostering of relationships with funding bodies and umbrella groups, and to keep informed of new initiatives and funding opportunities. A number of successful submissions were made for additional funding in 2020, and have had approval for proposed expenditure in Q4.</p> <p><i>Unfunded business cases to be submitted to HSE</i></p> <p>Unfunded services provided by Ability West have been highlighted to the HSE in Service Arrangement Review Meetings, and business cases for same have been submitted.</p>	<p>Detailed review of community development/ fundraising completed.</p> <p>Initial assessment completed around energy efficiency in premises.</p> <p>Additional funding secured for residential services.</p> <p>Ongoing submission of business cases to the HSE to respond to service needs.</p> <p>Strengthening Disability Services funding secured for the development of two sensory gardens in Ability West service locations.</p>

Goals	Aims/Outcomes	2019	2020	2021
Continuous Quality Improvement, Monitoring and Evaluation	<p>We will ensure that we comply with all legislation and regulations.</p> <p>We will carry out audits and monitor against plans and targets to ensure continuous improvement.</p> <p>We will develop service plans which deliver on this strategic plan and monitor and evaluate for impact on achieving our Vision and subsequent culture change.</p> <p>We will organise focus groups on relevant topics, develop surveys to seek views and feedback.</p>	<p>Ongoing compliance with legislative requirements.</p> <p>Various audits undertaken during 2019, including those under regulation and standards; Ongoing development of audit tools to monitor specific areas of service delivery.</p> <p>Family Forum held in May 2019.</p>	<p>Ongoing compliance with legislative requirements.</p> <p><i>Ability West no longer to be an AHB</i></p> <p>Ongoing discussion with the Housing Agency and the Department of Environment to establish the actions required to step down from this role by December 2021.</p> <p>Family Forum held in November 2020.</p>	<p>Ongoing compliance with legislative requirements, including successful re-registration of all designated centres with HIQA.</p> <p>Scoping exercise completed on Approved Housing Body status to understand new standards. Attendance at information sharing sessions with the Approved Housing Bodies Regulatory Authority (AHBRA).</p> <p>2-day training workshop on the Assisted Decision Making Act (ADMA) was delivered to Senior and Middle Management Teams, followed by a planning day and the creation of a Strategic Legislation Implementation Plan. This is in preparation for the full implementation of ADMA in 2022.</p> <p>Family fora held in 2021.</p>

Goals	Aims/Outcomes	2019	2020	2021
Communication	<p>We encourage communication at all levels, good communication is a vital part of our work and we will use various platforms and technology for communicating with our stakeholders.</p> <p>Social media will be utilised to promote our work and share good news stories.</p> <p>Multi-directional communication will be open and transparent between all stakeholders, with an emphasis on trust, respect and honesty.</p>	<p>Ongoing communication with all stakeholders – via email, letters, social media platforms (internal/external), intranet and internet.</p> <p>Meetings commenced with frontline teams to discuss communications issues/challenges.</p> <p>Services encouraged to provide material for social media outputs; enhanced our social media presence during 2019 with increased followers across all channels.</p>	<p><i>Ongoing work with Core HR</i></p> <p>Significant work to upgrade our Management Information system. It is intended that this will also provide a message board for all staff.</p> <p>Continued engagement across our social media platforms with increased followers on all channels.</p> <p><i>Advocacy Council</i></p> <p>The Senior Management Team met with the Chair and Facilitator of the Advocacy Council. Meetings to continue twice yearly and a number of actions and themes will be progressed.</p> <p><i>Focus Groups (Family Forum/ Advocacy Council/ Staff/Volunteers)</i></p> <p>We will endeavour to increase effective and meaningful engagement with stakeholders. The Family Forum resumed in November 2020 through an online format, with very positive feedback.</p>	<p>Ongoing growth of social media platforms.</p> <p>The Senior Management Team met with the Advocacy Council Chairperson and Facilitators. Work commenced to formalise the council's work and meetings with Senior Management.</p> <p>Review of internal communications completed.</p> <p>Ongoing communication with stakeholders through various fora.</p>

GENERAL INFORMATION

Legal Advisors

Kieran Murphy & Company LLP, 9 The Crescent, Galway, H91 W6T7
Jacob & Twomey Solicitors LLP, Merrythought House, Templeshannon, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford Y21 E0F3
Ronan Daly Jermyn LLP, Aengus House, Dock Street, Galway H91 Y2AE

Bank

Bank of Ireland, 22 Mainguard Street, Galway, H91 TX21
Bank of Ireland, Eyre Square, Galway, H91 D6X9
AIB Bank Lynch's Castle, Galway, H91 W400

Auditors

FCC Chartered Accountants & Registered Auditors,
3rd Floor, Lismoyle House, Merchants Road, Galway, H91 KPY0

Registered Office

Ability West, Blackrock House, Salthill, Galway, H91 R254

Ability West is a Company Limited by Guarantee, registered No. 41317 and is registered with the Revenue Commissioners as a Charity under Registration No. CHY6306. Ability West is approved for the Scheme of Tax Relief for Donations to Eligible Charities and other Approved Bodies under Section 848A Taxes Consolidation 1997 under Tax No. 2237226Q.

Éirim an Iarthair is a registered Business Name under the Registration of Business Names Act, 1963, Registered No. 335139.

Ability West:

Is a registered charity under the Charities Regulatory Authority, Registration No. 20011161
Has a Quality Management System, ISO 9001:2015 accredited, National Standards Authority of Ireland
Is accredited to Excellence Through People, 1000: 2017, National Standards Authority of Ireland
Is an equal opportunities employer

This Annual Report was project managed by Carol A. Browne, Communications and Executive Office Manager, and co-ordinated by Paulette Cully, Administrative Support, CEO Office.



Students and Staff from St. Joseph's Special School participating in a School Walk



Students and Staff from St. Joseph's Special School participating in a School Walk

QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE UPDATE 2021

By Eileen Costello-Conneely, Quality and Compliance Manager

The quality of services and supports is monitored and reviewed on a continual basis to ensure oversight in terms of trends, areas for improvement, shared learning and taking an overall integrated risk management approach to quality and compliance. Ability West complies with a wide range of legislation, regulations and standards in areas of corporate governance, management, services and supports. Some of these areas include company legislation, charities legislation, employment legislation, health and safety legislation, codes of practice, Statutory Instruments 366 and 367, national standards for residential and respite services, the HSE interim standards for day services, and national policies and procedures such as Children First and Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse.

Ability West has a Quality Management System in place, encompassing all services and supports, which provides a framework for overall integrated quality management. This is accredited by the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) to the international standard ISO 9001:2015, and

we have been successful in maintaining this standard in 2021. We have successfully maintained certification to the HR standard 'Excellence Through People 1000:2017', which is also accredited by the NSAI. The organisation has risk management processes aligned to the standard ISO 31000:2018 which is a framework for integrated risk management.

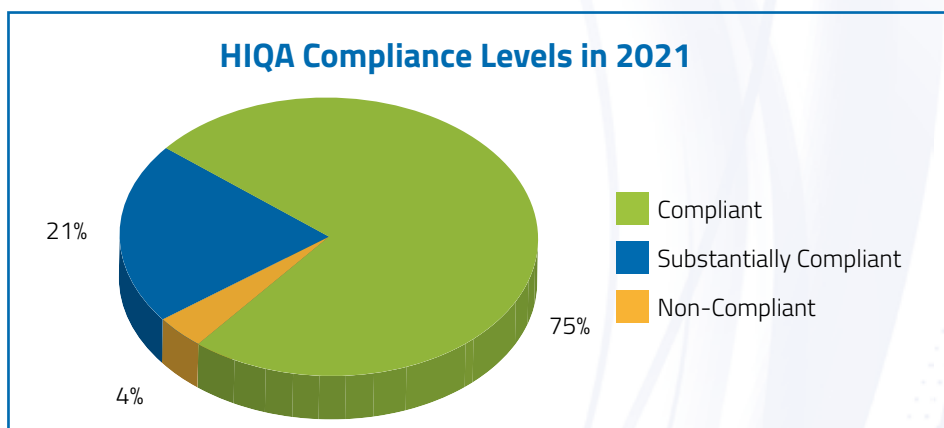
The Quality Management System identifies areas of good practice, areas that need improvement and progress on same, and takes an overall integrated risk management and continual improvement approach. This is achieved in many ways, for example: undertaking audits, analysis of audit results and reviews, external inspections, feedback, complaints, accident/incident records, statutory notification records and reviews through a number of fora such

as Senior Management Team Management Reviews and Quality and Safety Committees.

Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA)

Ability West complies with the HIQA National Standards for Residential Services for Children and Adults with Disabilities, along with the applicable legislation, i.e. Statutory Instrument 366 and 367. The standards and legislation are applicable to our residential and respite services and we have 28 designated centres registered with HIQA. HIQA undertook 25 inspections during 2021 and inspection reports can be accessed on HIQA's website or by contacting the relevant designated centre.

Compliance levels from inspections for 2021 and over the past five years are as follows:



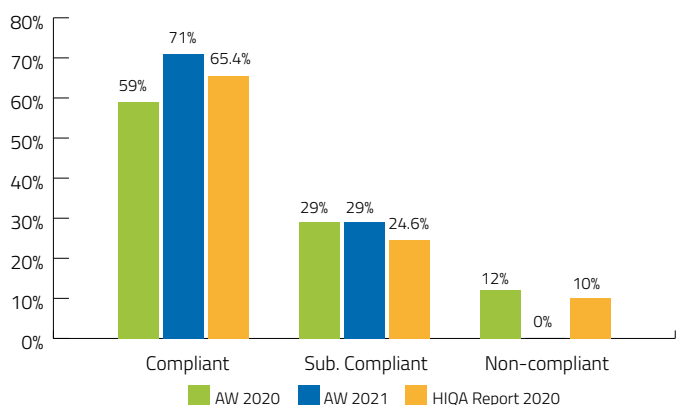
HIQA INSPECTIONS

COMPLIANCE LEVEL	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Compliant and Substantially Compliant	67%	95%	92%	89%	96%

Our compliance levels compare favourably with statistics outlined in HIQA's Overview Report 'Monitoring and Regulation of Disability Services in 2020', which states results for non-congregated settings of 91.6% compliance levels or 74.6%, compliant and 17% substantially compliant.

We have maintained our Key Performance Indicator linked to our Quality Objectives in terms of compliance with S.I. 367 and HIQA Standards. We continue to strive to achieve the highest levels of compliance.

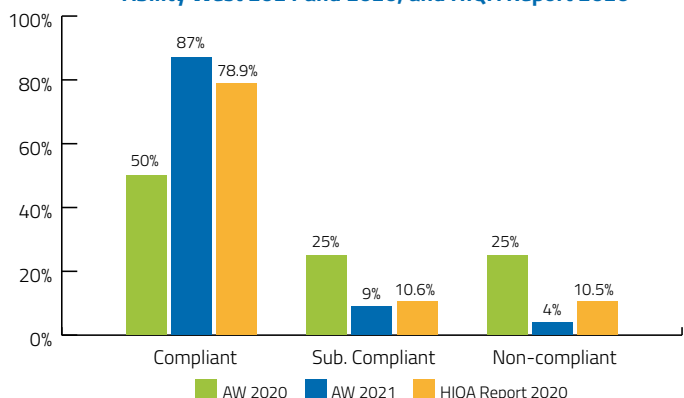
**Comparison of Regulation 5: Individual Assessment and Personal Plan
Ability West 2021 and 2020, and HIQA Report 2020**



The chart to the left provides comparison between the national rates of compliance as stated in the HIQA Overview Report 2020 and Ability West's HIQA inspections results (compliance rates) in 2020 and 2021, specifically in relation to Regulations 5 (Individualised Assessment and Personal Plan), 9 (Resident's Rights) and 23 (Governance and Management).

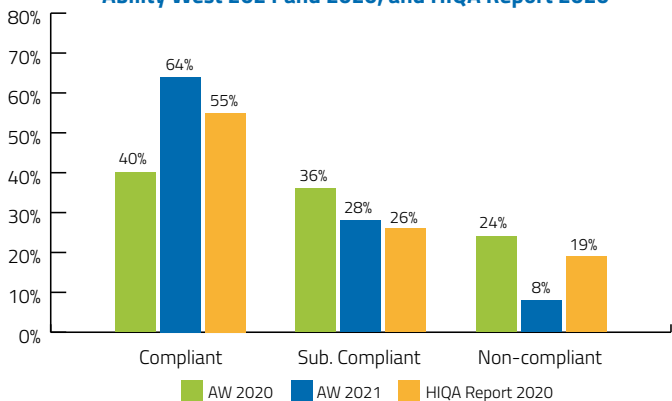
Regulation 5 is a crucial area and represents overall services and supports for service users. Ability West achieved 100% compliance in 2021, taking account of fully compliant and substantially compliant inspection outcomes.

**Comparison of Regulation 9: Residents Rights
Ability West 2021 and 2020, and HIQA Report 2020**



Ability West is guided by our mission, vision and core values to place the people we support central to service provision and in this regard Regulation 9 (Resident's Rights) is a significant priority. Our services strive for quality person-centred service provision and we are proud to share the progress achieved in 2021; the table above depicts how our performance on Regulation 9 improved in 2021 against the previous year, and furthermore exceeded the national rate of compliance as stated in the HIQA Report (2020).

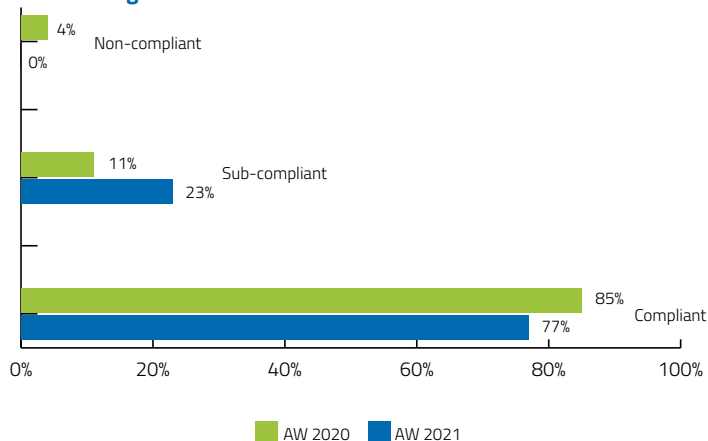
**Comparison of Regulation 23: Governance and Management
Ability West 2021 and 2020, and HIQA Report 2020**



HIQA's Overview Report states that 'good governance and management continues to be a fundamental cornerstone in the successful delivery of a good quality and safe service to residents living in designated centres, regardless of the setting.' Ability West has invested significantly in governance and management systems to underpin and support quality provision of services, and the improvements in compliance levels in 2021 reflect this work.

There was good demonstration of contingency planning particularly in relation to COVID-19, and this was reflected well in HIQA inspections during the year. Regulation 27: Infection Prevention and Control achieved 100% compliance (taking fully compliant and substantially compliant into account). The chart shows comparison between HIQA Overview Report 2020 and HIQA inspections in Ability West in 2021.

Regulation 27: Infection Control and Prevention



Compliance levels in a number of additional areas are outlined (considering fully compliant and substantially compliant results), reflecting the improved outcomes across the board in these areas;

REGULATION	ABILITY WEST INSPECTION RESULTS 2021	HIQA 2020 INSPECTION RESULTS (NON-CONGREGATED SETTINGS)
Reg. 6 Healthcare	100.0%	97.2%
Reg. 7 Positive Behaviour Support	93.0%	90.6%
Reg. 8 Safeguarding	95.7%	93.8%
Reg. 13 General Welfare and Development	100.0%	95.6%
Reg. 15 Staffing	96.0%	91.6%
Reg. 17 Premises	100.0%	86.7%
Reg. 28 Fire Precautions	86.6%	85.5%

Ability West continues to monitor compliance levels and act on findings, taking a proactive risk management approach. There are a number of processes in place in this regard, including shared learning through meetings between Quality and Compliance, Client Services and Unit Directors/ Persons in Charge. Quality improvement plans are reviewed and updated at Quality and Safety Executive Committee Meetings, through audits and annual reviews. Scheduled meetings take place between Quality and Compliance, the Director of Client Services and Assistant Directors of Client Services, the Chief Executive and Senior Management Team.

Notwithstanding these results, we have identified areas for further improvement, for example, in the area of complaints, Ability West's compliance levels for HIQA inspections in 2021 was 71%, which was a reduction on the previous year of 92%. This is being addressed through line management structures, and there is a renewed focus on complaints information sharing.

HSE Interim Standards for Day Services

The HSE has in place 'Interim Standards for New Directions, Services and Supports for Adults with Disabilities', which are applicable to Ability West's day service locations. There are two elements to the New Directions Key Implementation Targets as follows:

- a) Interim Standards for New Directions implementation
- b) National Framework for Person Centred Planning implementation

Day Services continue to work on the EASI tool completion and action planning for these standards, and also on the evaluation tool for Person Centred Planning implementation. Both tools are used as a self-evaluation process, providing an opportunity to verify areas where the standards are being met, and plans of actions to address any identified gaps in systems and processes, along with identifying additional opportunities for improvement.

Internal Audits

The quality of services and supports continues to be monitored in a variety of ways, including Provider Led Audits and an audit schedule is in place in this regard. Audits continued during 2021, with a small number being carried into 2022, due to pandemic-related delays. All residential and respite services have had at least one on-site audit, with others held virtually. Compliance with national guidelines in terms of infection prevention and control was maintained for all on-site audits.

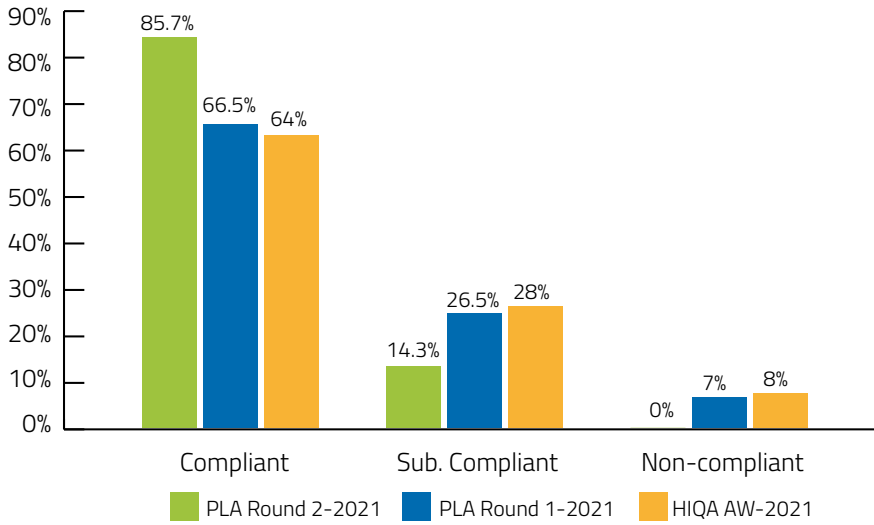
Areas audited include: residents' rights, dignity, consultation, communication, social care needs (including Person Centred Planning), healthcare, safe and suitable premises, health and safety, risk management, infection prevention and control, fire procedures, safeguarding, notification of incidents to HIQA, statements of purpose, governance and management,

and workforce. Progress on action plans from previous audits and inspections is also reviewed. Following each audit a report is prepared outlining areas audited, findings and areas for improvement are identified; an action plan is developed to address same.

Comparison of Ability West's Provider Led Audits (rounds 1 and 2) against HIQA inspection results in our services in a number of key areas are outlined on the next page:

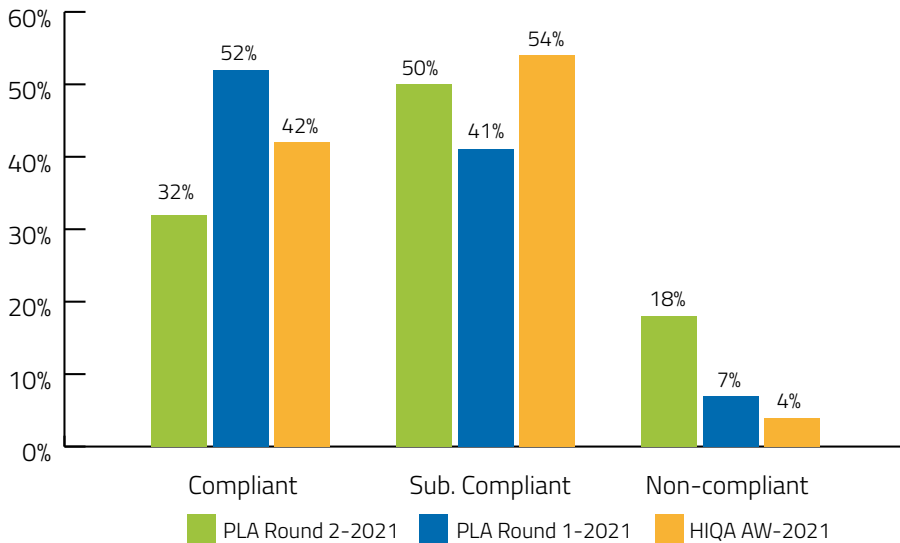
GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Comparison of Governance and Management



Results for Rounds 1 and 2 of 2021 are similar, however, when compared with the HIQA Inspection results, there is a decrease in compliance which is being addressed in 2022.

Comparison of Health and Safety, Risk Management



Risk Management

Risk Management is a key area and increased focus was placed on this in Provider Led Audits during the year. This approach led to improved compliance which is evident from results of HIQA inspections in 2021.

A number of areas were identified for improvement which is reflective of areas identified in HIQA Inspections, for example, ensuring that centres' assessment

of needs reflect the supports of service users, and records are up-to-date. The area of complaints was reviewed and in some cases areas for improvement were identified, for example, complaints to be dealt with in a timely manner and complainants being informed of an outcome. The areas for improvement continue to be reviewed during 2022.

Quality and Safety Committees

Ability West has a Quality and Safety Board Committee in place, with the purpose of driving quality improvement and to ensure there are appropriate and effective governance structures, processes, standards and oversight in place with regard to quality and safety. This committee meets biannually.

We also have a Quality and Safety Executive Committee with the purpose of overseeing and evaluating the comprehensive quality and safety programme, with associated structures, policies and processes which are the vehicle for improving quality and safety, and this is underpinned by an integrated risk management approach. This committee reviews various statistics and analysis in terms of trends and areas for improvement. It reviews areas in terms of risk management, with the aim and objective to ensure that all clinical and social care actions are aligned within a clinical governance system and to promote and advance the importance and value of quality, safety and risk management. During 2021, 13 meetings were held with some having a specific focus on, for example: potential development of a Human Rights Promotion Committee by merging the Restrictive Practices Committee and Human Rights Committee.

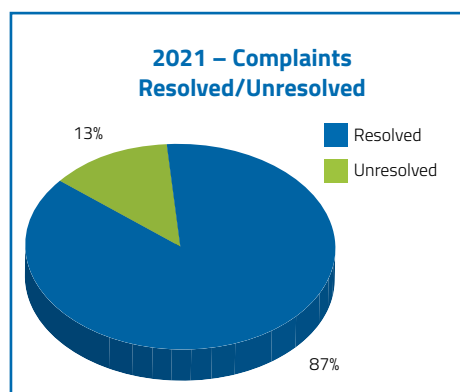
Feedback and Complaints

Ability West welcomes feedback and complaints, and information about how to make a complaint or provide feedback is available in all services. Our Complaints, Compliments and Feedback Policy and Procedure is available on our website, www.abilitywest.ie.

We utilise a Quality Management Information System (QMIS)

to record feedback, manage complaints and analyse same. This feeds into the overall processes for review, improvements and shared learning. Total feedback recorded for 2021 was 56, the majority were from family members and related to overall compliments on the quality of services and supports. There was also positive feedback in relation to supports provided during the pandemic.

We received 61 complaints in 2021, 87% of which are resolved, the remaining 13% remain active and are being worked on. Complaints come from a variety of sources, for example, from service users, family members, and staff advocating for service users. Complaints range from dissatisfaction with some elements of services and supports, to access to respite, and alleged inappropriate behaviour.



Health and Safety

Ability West has a Corporate Safety Statement and each location has a Centre Specific Safety Statement. The organisation complies with the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 and associated regulations.

The QMIS is a management tool used to record incidents, which is a key element of managing health and safety. The total number of incidents recorded in 2021 was 3,332, an increase on 2020 incidents, which was 3,093. This was primarily due to COVID-19 related incidents being recorded (i.e. confirmed cases of COVID-19).

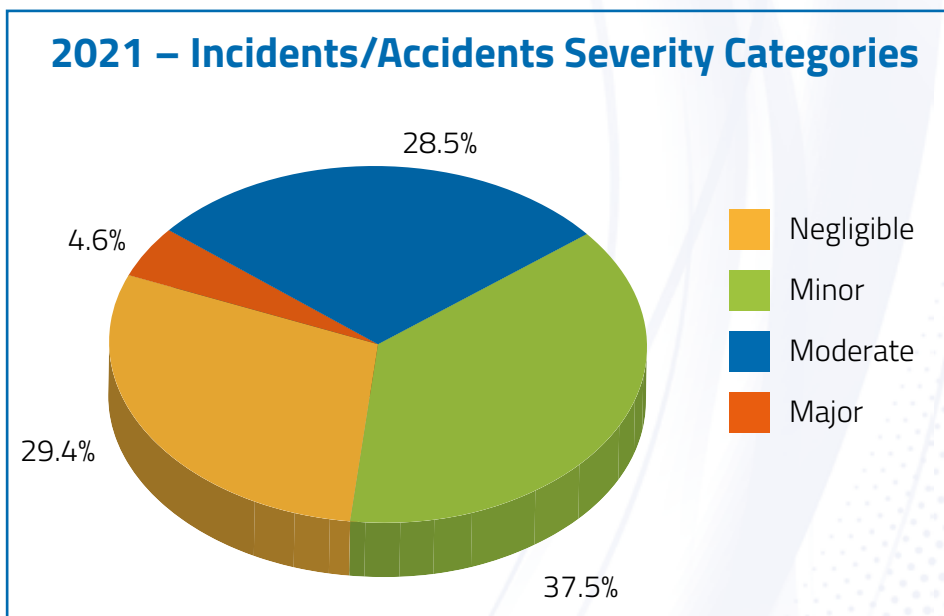
The category of 'Infection Control' represents the highest number of incidents during the year and primarily related to COVID-19 cases. The second highest category was 'Behaviours that Challenge', however, on review of statistics, there was a reduction compared with numbers recorded in 2020, and significantly, a sizeable reduction in numbers recorded under the 'major' category. The third highest was 'Medication Incidents' which on further inspection comprises a number of external errors identified early by services (e.g. packing, labelling issues), and therefore could be more accurately described as 'near misses' rather than incidents.

A breakdown of the severity levels of incidents recorded on QMIS is detailed hereunder. Similar results were recorded for 2020, but 2021 saw an increase in the 'major' category, which is attributed to COVID-19 and the coding of confirmed cases (diagnoses) in this category being recorded as 'major' incidents.

Data from incidents, accidents and near misses are analysed on an annual basis and the

themes and trends identified inform organisational learning, identify areas for improvement and management of risk. These are monitored closely at senior and middle management levels and relevant learning and actions are disseminated through line management and team structures to form an organisational-wide approach.

Ability West reports incidents to the State Claims Agency via the National Incident Management System (NIMS). We report on incidents coded as 'moderate', 'major' or 'catastrophic'. There is an arrangement in place with regard to notification of confirmed cases of COVID-19 and some specific categories of suspected cases to the State Claims Agency. Ability West is not delegated to the State Claims Agency's General Indemnity Scheme and as such is only presently required to report service user related incidents. However, Ability West would welcome inclusion under the General Indemnity Scheme as operated by the State Claims Agency.

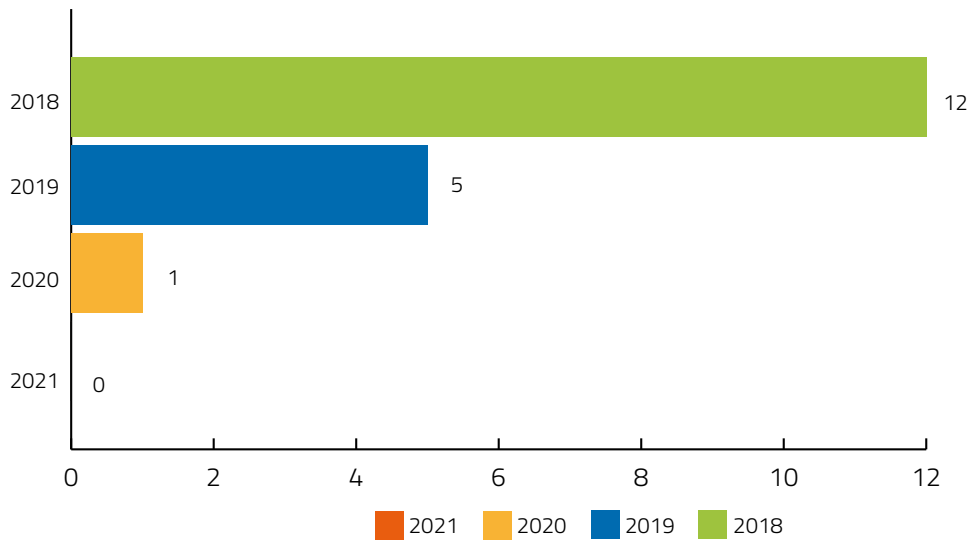


Freedom of Information and Data Protection

Ability West complies with Freedom of Information and Data Protection legislation, and there are robust processes in place in this regard. The organisation has a Freedom of Information Publication Scheme in place which can be accessed through our website. Data Protection policies and procedures are in place. Year on year improvements have been made with regard to data breaches which reflects increased awareness about data protection across the organisation.

FOI AND DATA PROTECTION STATISTICS	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021
FOI Requests	10	4
Internal Reviews	1	0
Reviews completed for Ombudsman	0	2
Subject Access Requests	0	1
Subject Access Requests – Under Administration Access by HR	2	0
Data Breaches – Data Protection reported to Data Commission Office	1	0

Data Breaches reported to Data Protection Commission



Restrictive Practices and Human Rights

Ability West has a Restrictive Practices Committee and a Human Rights Committee in place. Both are significant elements of the organisation's processes, particularly in terms of promoting rights in line with our vision and mission statement and our strategic plan. Both committees met regularly during 2021 to review and consider referrals. The

committees promote a restraint free environment, minimisation of rights restrictions and best practice approach, with the guiding principles in the event of restrictive practices being deemed necessary, that the least restrictive practice is only used as a last resort and ensuring the practices are always legitimate, safe and minimal, and for the shortest period of time. Developments progressed in 2021 in relation to the establishment of one overall

committee encompassing both committees; this new group, the Human Rights Promotion Committee, will be progressed in 2022. This review and update of organisational structures aligns with the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015, UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Ability West's vision, mission and values.

Pandemic Update (COVID-19)

Since the pandemic was declared in March 2020 a range of processes were established and are now in place in Ability West in response. These processes of information sharing, enhanced Infection Prevention and Control, risk management, governance oversight and reporting and liaising with external bodies (Public Health, HSE) has continued through 2021. The Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) meets regularly to discuss, review, plan and respond to COVID-19 related issues, for example, service openings, closures, resumption of services, guidance documents, and vaccination programme. During the year, the Chief Executive communicated regularly with the organisation with regard to local and national updates relevant to our services.

Overall measures during the pandemic included contingency planning at local and organisational level, capacity assessments, infection prevention and control measures and guidelines, review of personal protection equipment and adequate supplies, risk assessments in relation to confirmed cases and impact on services.

Extensive work is ongoing in relation to supports for service users in terms of day, residential and respite services and trying to maintain a good quality of life for all, taking an overall risk management approach while adhering to national guidelines. Other ongoing developments include review of national guidance and their impact on services, and review of Ability West policies and procedures and their impact, to ensure compliance with the national guidelines.

Processes are in place with regard to notification and monitoring of COVID-19 cases, particularly in terms of

preparedness and infection prevention and control processes. During 2021, Ability West maintained frequent notifications to a number of authorities of suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases or outbreaks, i.e. Public Health, the HSE, State Claims Agency, and HIQA and a process for same was set up through QMIS.

In the event of a COVID-19 outbreak, an Ability West Response Team (AWRT) is convened and the CIRT facilitates its formation. Ability West had a total of 12 outbreaks in 2021. Each AWRT is chaired by the Director of Client Services or a delegate, with membership from the service, and a range of members from relevant departments and disciplines. The AWRT monitors the outbreak, provides oversight for the management of the situation, and declares the outbreak over. The AWRT also oversees the numbers of ill people (staff and service users), spectrum of symptoms, dates of infection, and ensures implementation of advice from Public Health where possible.

Ability West has four Lead Worker Representatives and one of their key roles is working collaboratively with management to ensure, insofar as reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare of staff in relation to COVID-19, and to promote good infection prevention and control strategies. They also have a role in terms of a pathway being available to escalate any unresolved concerns at frontline level, within existing line management structures. The Lead Worker Representatives met with members of the Quality and Compliance Department on a number of occasions during the year and they submitted queries to the CIRT, all of which were responded to. This is a beneficial process in terms of having another valuable link to frontline staff for queries. The Lead Worker Representatives have been supported by the organisation to undertake training for the role.

Integrated Risk Management

Risk management is an integral part of overall services and supports, and our policy and procedure in this regard describes the processes, using the standard ISO 31000:2018 as a framework for integrated risk management. Each service has a centre risk register and risk assessments, detailing risk treatment, along with individual risk assessments for service users. If it becomes apparent that a particular situation poses a risk that may not be able to be carried in the service, this is escalated through the line management structure. Specific risks are entered, as relevant, on the Corporate Risk Register, which is the recording tool for the management of identified corporate risks, informed by more detailed local risk analysis at middle and frontline management levels. Risks are also identified in other ways, for example, through complaints, inspections, audits, current pandemic situation, and review of services and supports. This is overseen by the Chief Executive's Office, Senior Management Team and Quality and Safety Committees.

Our quality management systems provide a solid structure in terms of addressing areas for improvement, which have been identified through processes, such as HIQA Inspections, Provider Led Audits and Complaints.

In conclusion, we continue to strive to achieve high standards of service and supports for service users, and would like to compliment all staff members on their continued endeavours and hard work in this regard, particularly during 2021 and the challenges that presented through the pandemic situation.

ADVOCACY COUNCIL 2021

By John Howard, Facilitator



Stephen Joyce,
Advocacy Council Chairperson

Throughout 2021 the Advocacy Council remained committed to reaching out and representing

everyone who avails of the services of Ability West. In June 2021 great tributes were paid to the outgoing Chairperson, John Farragher, and his excellent work in giving a voice to people across our services. Many thanks to John for his hard work and dedication to the Council.

Stephen Joyce was subsequently elected to take up the position of Chairperson. Stephen has been working hard highlighting the importance of advocacy and in particular self-advocacy. He co-hosts the 'Live at 11' Show, which broadcasts via Zoom across the organisation every Monday. Stephen and his co-host, Joseph Faulkner, reach out to their peers and keep them connected, informed and represented.

The Advocacy Council welcomed Shane Scanlon as a Facilitator, alongside John Howard. Shane has many years' experience working in residential settings and brings a wealth of knowledge and enthusiasm to the role.

Our links with advocacy groups in Section 38 and Section 39 organisations across Ireland continue to strengthen every year, which gives a collective weight to promoting human rights and creating a better world for everyone. We are looking forward to actively promoting the benefits of the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015 as we continue to listen carefully to the will and preference of all those we support.

COIS NA COILLE UPDATE

By Killian Keane, Cois na Coille

My name is Killian Keane and I'm from Loughrea. I work in Cois Na Coille and last July I was 'the Big 50'.

I wasn't able to have a party at work because of COVID-19. On 31st August this year I had a party here with my friends in Cois Na Coille. I am a big fan of Joe Connolly, the famous Galway hurler, and I know lots about him. In 1980, when I was 9 years old, I went to Croke Park and watched Galway win the All-Ireland. Joe Connolly made a speech after the match and I often watch it on YouTube.

On the day of my birthday party staff had arranged the biggest surprise of my life - Joe Connolly came to visit me and to wish me a happy birthday. I was so happy to meet my hero Joe. We sat and talked about hurling and he had some of my birthday cake. In January this year Joe came back to see me and presented me with a framed jersey and we both signed our names on it. He is a really lovely man. Thank you to all my friends in Ability West for making my birthday so special and helping me to meet my best friend and my hero.



Killian Keane with his hero Joe Connolly

VOLUNTEER UPDATE 2021

By Linda Keane, Volunteer Programme Manager

It was hoped that 2021 would be the start of our journey back to normality, however, unfortunately that road proved to be a bumpy one. Waves and surges in COVID-19 numbers made it difficult to facilitate the return of volunteers. It was challenging to engage volunteers with Ability West in the way they would have liked. Fortunately, due to the successful vaccination roll-out, volunteers who were in a befriending role were able to resume some contact with friends and buddies as the year progressed.

The "Live at 11" Zoom show went from strength to strength in 2021. Joseph Faulkner began co-hosting, alongside Stephen Joyce. The banter between Joseph and Stephen Joyce kept many of us entertained on

Monday mornings. There is never a shortage of birthday wishes and song requests on the show. Occasionally, a special guest joins the show and recently our special guest was the Minister of State at the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Affairs, Anne Rabbitte, TD.

Throughout 2021 we were challenged to keep the Best Buddies Programme going. However, NUIG's Best Buddies Committee stayed very active and organised a virtual Friendship Walk in April. This event raised over €1,190 for the Best Buddies College Programme which was a truly great achievement in such challenging times.

November was a busy month for the NUIG Best Buddies

Committee. They partnered with a college chapter in Macao, China and regularly participated in virtual exchanges to discuss events on campus, updates in relation to their Best Buddies College Programme and share updates on life in general. This was a great learning experience for all the students involved. The committee also participated in 'Coldvember' which involved jumping into the sea in Salthill in the very early hours of the morning. Proceeds from this event went to the Galway Rape Crisis Centre. The Best Buddies are a great group of generous young people indeed!

As always, many thanks to all our wonderful volunteers and we look forward to a return to normal activities in 2022!



NUIG Best Buddies Cheque Presentation to Linda Keane, Ability West
l-r: Eimear O'Tuathail, Aoife Cadden, Linda Keane and Odhran Whelehan.

MEITHEAL

By Stephen Togher, Senior Instructor, Meitheal

October 2021 saw an easing of some COVID-19 restrictions, allowing us to reconnect with our friends and local organisations in the Moycullen community. We had discussions with the Moycullen Tidy Towns (MTT) group to identify possible collaborative projects. As a result of these discussions a plan was devised to enhance the recreation area at the Meitheal Centre, with particular considerations given to sensory aspects.

The main features of the 'Enhancement Plan' were;

- To purchase 'patio sized' apple trees to be potted in order to give a natural feel to the area alongside climber plants to decorate and embellish the existing fencing
- To collaborate with Club Óige Mhaigh Cuillinn to create three murals (on wooden panels). Murals to carry our logo and include themes of nature with plants, birds, butterflies, etc.

- To provide wheelchair accessible raised flower beds, giving a 'sensory' aspect
- To pot flowering bulbs providing an array of spring colour

The first part of this plan commenced in October 2021 when service users, staff and members of MTT (special thanks to Megan Bromley) met at Dangan Nurseries to choose the apple trees, pots, clematis and soil. Many thanks to the staff there for delivering same and for their enthusiasm and support of this project, and to the local community for donating the funding to make this project possible. These new features enhance an otherwise 'sterile space' into an aesthetically pleasing environment, providing sensory fulfilment by engaging the senses of sight, smell, touch and taste and it will provide an area of calm, comfort and safety.

This was a joyful and refreshing experience for all involved and a reminder of how much we

have missed such interactions over this difficult period. We will keep you updated on further developments of this project. Many thanks to local organisations: Moycullen Tidy Towns, Club Óige Mhaigh Cuillinn, Teach na Gaeilge and Dangan Nurseries. We very much appreciate your support.



Aoife McGrath busy gardening in Meitheal Services



Aoife McGrath and James Walsh visiting Dangan Nurseries

MOUNTBELLEW HUB

The Team in Mountbellew

The Mountbellew Resource Centre first opened in October 2010. In recent years there has been increased demand for services here and capacity in the Resource Centre was reached in 2020. To meet the needs of individuals from the area a significant amount of work was undertaken to secure a rental location in Mountbellew and we acknowledge the HSE's support with same. We opened the doors to our new hub in March 2021 with the team comprising of a Senior Instructor and three Basic Instructors and led by a Frontline Manager. Little did we realise how successful the hub would become in such a short period of time.

Due to the physical distancing guidelines that were in place in March, we could only open at 50% capacity. This meant that service users attended every second week. However, since Autumn 2021 full attendance gradually returned and everyone settled into the new

"I enjoy the social outings from the hub"
CAROLINE GLYNN

hub. Our timetable of activities is gradually increasing with every passing week.

We have taken part in several interesting competitions and challenges and have had some great successes. Notably, Maria Quigley who won first prize in IDS-TILDA's national Easter art competition for disability services and Caroline Glynn who won first prize in their Christmas 2021 competition.

"I enjoy the craic and fun with my friends and staff"
NOREEN GERAGHTY

We took part in the "Walking into Summer" challenge and had some spot prize winners through our weekly step count challenge. Through staff support we

"I've learned to become more independent"
MARIA QUIGLEY

increased our activity levels with regular walks in the local woods and parklands, participation in yoga and sit/stand classes on Zoom, as well as Zumba dancing on YouTube. Our service is very person-centred and focuses on the New Directions standards. Despite the challenges of restrictions and lockdowns, we still managed to enjoy some lovely summer outings in the glorious weather of summer 2021.

"It's nice and calm"
STEPHEN MITCHELL

Some service users completed a "Digital Skills for Citizens" programme in collaboration with Roscommon Leadership Partnership, which they really enjoyed. Other service users were able to return to face-to-face classes with the GRETB in Dunmore after a year of online learning. We really enjoyed and continue to enjoy the weekly "Live at 11" Show and regularly contribute with requests and observations.

Maria Quigley was nominated as the hub's Advocacy Champion and she is very focused in this important role. A number of service users have part-time employment in the locality and travel independently to and from their work locations. Some service users choose to have their lunch independently on Fridays, while others are supported and facilitated to make their various personal appointments as independently as possible.

"I'm very happy here. It's quieter and I enjoy the smaller group"
LIAM MANNION



Mountbellew Hub Opening l-r: Maria Quigley, Jennifer McCormack, Caroline Glynn, Stephen Mitchell and Liam Mannion pictured at the opening of the Mountbellew Hub in March 2021

SEAN MULVOY HUB

My Experience with GRETB

By Ellen Jennings

Starting back to GRETB in September 2021 was a great experience. It was a sign that life was returning to normal after all the restrictions. I wanted to learn and I had missed this because COVID had made going to college impossible. Things were different, we wore masks in class, social distance and clean everything we touched. But this was a small obstacle that I could overcome. Also, by now I was used to all the things that we had to do to stay safe. To me life feels normal again. I can do the things that I did before the pandemic. COVID was frightening at the start but now it's okay and I can face it without fear. I wish the same for everyone!



Ellen Jennings

My Trip to Dublin

By Oliver Flanagan

In July 2021, I went to Dublin on my summer day trip. I travelled to Dublin on the train. I went with Ronan, Damien and Janna. I visited 'Forbidden Planet' and the game store (where there were lots of comics and games). We also went to a cappuccino bar for a drink. My favourite part of the trip was going to the game store and that is where I got my first fighting game. We travelled back to Galway on the train. It was a great trip and I cannot wait to visit Dublin again.



Oliver Flanagan

My Trip to Athlone

By Sean Coyne

In July 2021, a group of us from the Sean Mulvoy Hub visited Athlone. It was a very hot day and the sun was shining. We went to the Utopia Spa to enjoy a spa day, which was very relaxing. After the spa we went to a restaurant in Athlone. We then got ice creams to cool us down. Afterwards we went for a lovely walk in the sunshine. Then we went to catch the bus home, we had to wait a while for the bus to come. We did not mind waiting because the weather was so nice. We all had a great time in Athlone. My favourite part of the day was going to the spa and getting a massage.



Sean Coyne

ST. JOSEPH'S TRAINING CENTRE

By Matthew Ellis, Manager, St. Joseph's Training Services

Despite the ongoing challenges of the pandemic, our training services in Galway City, Portumna and Tuam returned to as close to normal a service as we could in 2021. We welcomed a vibrant group of new trainees in the city and Tuam, and held a graduation for our city and Tuam graduates: Afraa Al Ali, Zeeshan Ahmed, Francis Carr, Emily-Rose Cummins, Grace Hannon, Colm Moloney, Craig Noone and Piotr Woitazek. Congratulations to everyone and we wish you well into the future.

The number and range of QQI modules completed by trainees was exceptional in 2021, with 76 folders of work submitted to QQI, 47 at Level 1 and 29 at Level 2. Modules included: Visual Art, Writing, Listening and Speaking, Non-verbal Communication, Personal Care, Personal Safety, Food Choice and Health, Relaxation Techniques, Using Technology, Health Related Exercise, Personal Decision-Making, Data Handling and Reading.

A thorough review and update of training services' policies and procedures was completed in 2021, led by Quality and Compliance Manager, Eileen Costello-Conneely. Staff and trainees have started preparing for re-registration with QQI, which is another substantial and time-consuming task that will be formally completed in 2022.

Some return to work placements was possible in Galway City and it has been fantastic to see the new poly-tunnel and garden embedded into the work of trainees, as community opportunities remained limited. In Tuam trainees returned to St. Benin's for external training opportunities and engaged in their community through the Tidy Towns project, often heading out to pick litter in their community. Trainees in Portumna were delighted to move into their new hub, which will be a fantastic training and development location for many years to come, and was made possible through the hard work of Gerry Blake, Manager, St. Dymphna's Day Service and Clare Loughnane, Senior Instructor.

Well done to everyone involved in our training services, it was another busy and fun year of training and learning.



St. Joseph's Training Services (Tuam) Graduates: Piotr Woitazek and Colm Maloney



Getting ready for another season of growing at St. Joseph's Training Services are l-r: Gabriele Simonkeviciute, Emily-Rose Cummins and Francis Carr. The new polytunnel was funded by Galway City Council as part of 'Healthy Galway City'.

FUNDRAISING UPDATE 2021

By John Feely, Assistant Director of Finance

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to have a detrimental impact on our fundraising income for 2021. In total our fundraising income for the year amounted to €48,375.56. We received three substantial bequests during the year totalling €365,000.

Many of our traditional fundraising events such as our annual Golf Fundraiser in Galway Golf Club could not go ahead due to Government restrictions. However, we are extremely grateful for the numerous donations and contributions

received from various businesses and individuals. This ongoing support is very much appreciated, particularly during a year that was financially challenging for many.

As in previous years, fundraised monies were utilised towards the purchase of buildings, motor vehicles and equipment, which are essential to the delivery of high quality services.

A sincere thank you to each person who organised a fundraising event for us during 2021 and to everybody who donated and supported us.

Hopefully 2022 will be a better year for all and we look forward to your continued support. We welcome the appointment of our new Community Development Officer, Michael Flanagan. Please continue to check our various social media platforms for details of events.



Family and friends of St. Dymphna's Day Service, Portumna, presenting a cheque for €5,000

AUDITED ACCOUNTS

The Company's Auditors, FCC Chartered Accountants and Registered Auditors, reported, without qualification, that the 2021 financial statements gave a true and fair view of the company's affairs and of its results for the year and were properly prepared in accordance with generally accepted accounting practice and the Companies Act 2014.

The audited accounts were approved at a meeting of the Board of Directors held on 30th May 2022 and were signed on behalf of the Board of Directors by Dermot O'Neill and Michael Finnerty.

A full copy of the audited accounts 2021 is available on our website: www.abilitywest.ie.



Janna Lindstrom, Staff at Croílár Hub participating in the 'WE ACT' National Campaign.



Michael Ward, Dochas Services, who won 3rd place in the St. Jarlath's Credit Union Art Competition

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ability West would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the various individuals and organisations whose co-operation and support have been particularly invaluable to us in 2021.

- The Department of Health; Health Protection and Surveillance Centre; Health Service Executive and local HSE Staff, in particular Disability Services and Public Health; the Health Service Executive Corporate Employee Relations Services; Departments of Education and Skills, Social Protection and Rural and Community Development.
- Galway Rural Development (GRD) - A number of our services availed of the GRD, Rural Social Scheme and TÚS Schemes in 2021. We are very grateful for the tremendous work the scheme participants do in our services.
- Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board (GRETB) - Mitigating Education Disadvantage Fund
- Healthy Ireland
- Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission - Grant
- SSE Airtricity – Community Grant

In addition, we are extremely grateful to community groups, businesses and individuals from Galway City and County and beyond for their ongoing assistance and support in 2021, there are too many to name individually but we know who you are.

Our thanks to colleagues in statutory, non-statutory, voluntary service providers and umbrella groups who have supported us throughout the year.

Special thanks to all our staff whose commitment and dedication to the people we support, as always, has been second to none. Many thanks to our Board Members and all volunteers who continued to support us in a variety of ways. We very much appreciate your volunteerism throughout the year.

Finally, we would like to thank the children and adults we support, their parents, carers, and family members for their understanding and resilience during the year. It has been another challenging year for you and we fervently hope that things will be easier in 2022, with the easing of restrictions and a return to some semblance of normality. We will work alongside you to achieve service delivery in a safe manner as we move through 2022.



Tony Corr celebrating his 70th Birthday



Dan Burns from local business 'My Happy Home Galway' donating two Celtic planters to Brooklodge Nursery



Graduation celebrations, St. Joseph's Training Services (Tuam)



New members of the Avondale Hub, Amy Ward and Caoimhe Dowd, enjoying their trip to Gruane Pet Farm



Snipe Services l-r: Emma Moran, Pat O'Donnell and Jenny Faherty



St. Joseph's Training Service (Galway) Graduation l-r: Craig Noone, Grace Hannon, Emily-Rose Cummins and Francis Carr



enabling people with disabilities



Back Cover – Service Users creating beautiful wall art in their garden in Beechwood Services



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